

THE

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1665.—VOL. LXIV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 30, 1895.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"I KNOW HOW GREAT MUST HAVE BEEN THE TEMPTATION BEFORE YOU CONSENTED, DEAR," FRANCESCA SAID, STEADILY.

BITTER-SWEET.

—10:—

CHAPTER I.

SIR BLOUNT CARDEW, of Cardew Court, sat at the end of his perfectly appointed dinner-table, with his eldest daughter Augusta facing him at the other—the place she had filled and regarded as her rightful one since her mother's death.

On the Baronet's right hand sat Mrs. Barlow, from the Vicarage, with his youngest daughter Penelope.

On his left, young Vereker, also from the Vicarage, with the second and fairest daughter of Sir Blount Cardew, by name Francesca, but commonly called Frank.

The sunset light—for it was an evening in July—flooded the oval table through the open dining-room windows, fell lavishly and glittered about the glowing epergnes, flashed eagerly upon the massive old silver, just touched with most tender tints the white brow of Francesca Cardew, and changed for the moment her rich brown hair into a crown of burnished gold.

Francesca was the Baronet's favourite

daughter beyond all doubt, even as she, unquestionably, was the most beautiful of the three.

Augusta, who was tall and spare, and who would be five-and-twenty at the end of the month, was wont to affirm, however, in that subdued ladylike manner of hers, that her sister Francesca's style and figure were by far too womanly, too matured, for her two-and-twenty years, just indeed as Augusta declared sometimes that her youngest sister, Penelope—usually known as Poppy—was too hoydenish and *gauche* for a girl of eighteen.

The late Lady Cardew had had a pronounced weakness for long and large-sounding names; and her three little daughters, as they arrived one after the other, had, as their father himself said, suffered in consequence.

On this particular evening, as she faced her ruddy, jolly-looking father, Augusta Cardew, in her high-backed chair, appeared somehow to be more quiet and severe in her manner than ordinary.

"She was never a remarkably demonstrative person, as everyone was aware; but on the present occasion, said sapient Penelope to her-

self, there was certainly something amiss with Augusta.

As Poppy mentally phrased it, Gussie looked downright "glum."

Could it be possible that Miss Cardew was secretly resenting the Reverend Cuthbert Masey's non-appearance at her father's dinner-table, after his fervid promise to her of the morning that he would not fail to accompany thither his pupil Jim Vereker and Mrs. Barlow?

Jim, who, youth-like, loved a good dinner, and Mrs. Barlow herself, who likewise owned to the same pardonable weakness, as her broad smiling visage and portly form might not unreasonably have led one to conclude, had come up well to time, it was true; but the Vicar of Sparling had broken his word to her, Miss Cardew considered privately, in taking himself off at a moment's notice to that sham death-bed of old Timothy Browne.

Why, the good-for-nothing old wretch had had quite a dozen death-beds already, prior to the one of this evening, Augusta recollected severely, and each one of them had ended always in complete recovery.

A death-bed, in short, with this shameless old

sinner of a Timothy, meant nothing more or less than a bottle of port or cognac from the simple-minded Cuthbert Masey's cellar at the Vicarage. Consequently the wicked old man, the most conscienceless, perhaps, of all the Reverend Cuthbert's poorer parishioners, was constantly dying—dying, moreover, at seasons most inconvenient to his betters, as Augusta Cardew was thinking irritably.

Curiously enough, Francesca, too, was feeling bitterly sore and wounded as she sat there at her father's table on this warm and dazzling evening in July.

But again, perhaps, it was only the shrewd and speculative Penelope who guessed that poor Frank's soul was very sick within her.

Outwardly, Francesca was in every wise her own sweet natural self. It was merely somewhere in her beautiful wistful golden-brown eyes that the pain and shadow lay so unmistakably for Penelope.

These twin—Penelope and Francesca—were true sisters, staunch friends to each other; and, although the former was laughing and chattering gaily enough with portly, good-natured, over-dressed Mrs. Barlow, her warm young heart was bleeding freely for Frank sitting opposite, who was bearing her trouble there so bravely, next to Jim.

Even Poppy herself sighed unconsciously every now and then, as she stole a furtive glance through the leaves and tendrils of the epergnes at Frank and Jim Vereker.

Did not Poppy know quite well that the lanky, long-legged Jim, with his boyish tanned face and crisp curly corn-coloured hair, adored the very ground that her sister Francesca trod upon?

Helgho! Things somehow were all awry, all topsy-turvy, Penelope Cardew was thinking, as she lightly rallied Mrs. Barlow about her fondness for the Salcombe Races.

"Salcombe Races!" cried Sir Blount, rather ruefully, overhearing the magic words. "Don't talk of 'em, Poppy, now! This is the first season for many a year that I've—well, I may say that we've all missed going to them. But Frank yonder, you know," with a glance half affectionate, half reproachful, at his second daughter, "got me to promise her that we wouldn't any of us go this year; and you see, therefore, Mrs. Barlow"—turning to his smiling buxom neighbour—"that we have all stopped away from 'em. That, madam, is the long and the short of it," nodded Sir Blount Cardew.

Mrs. Barlow beamed on Sir Blount—she was given to beaming, indeed, on the master of Cardew Court.

Penelope was of opinion that Mrs. Barlow should be labelled "dangerous;" for the girl had one night heard her father declare—it was one night after dinner, when his head and his heart perhaps were alike imprudently heated—that Cuthbert Masey's amiable aunt was a "doosed fine woman."

"How extraordinary of Frank, to be sure!" Mrs. Barlow said in her hearty fashion.

She had known the Cardew Court girls intimately for the last half-a-dozen years or more—in fact, ever since she and the nephew whom she had adopted and brought up from a youngster in pinafores had first come to live together at the Sparling Vicarage—and naturally had grown to speak of them all by their Christian names.

"Why, last year, I remember," continued Mrs. Barlow, "we all of us went together and enjoyed the fun amazingly—at least, I did, speaking for myself," laughed she. "For I had never before been to the Salcombe Races, Sir Blount, until you included me in your party last year—Cuthbert of course not approving of horse-racing."

"I also consider it a pastime at once reprehensible and degrading to human nature," put in Miss Cardew, in her chill unruflled tones, "and rejoice greatly that to-day is the last of the evil carnival. I myself have ever detested the Salcombe Races; though I know that I have invariably been weak enough to allow myself to be persuaded into accompanying my father and the rest," added the fair Augusta virtuously.

"Well, perhaps, everything considered, the whole thing is—is it wicked and worldly and reprehensible, as you say, my dear Gussie," agreed Mrs. Barlow easily. "But then, you see, I know nothing whatever of the actual racing doings and certainly care less. I was thinking more particularly of the jaunt there and back. I do so love a jaunt!" cried Mrs. Barlow enthusiastically. "And there is your picnic the week after next, is there not, my dears?"

"Yes," answered Poppy absently, watching at the same time Frank's bad eyes and troubled mouth. "Given fine weather, it is to be the week after next, Mrs. Barlow."

"On my birthday, you know," explained Augusta graciously.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Mrs. Barlow. "The twenty-seventh of July is your birthday, is it not, Gussie, dear? However, I cannot think," went on the good lady, harking back to the old theme, "why Frank should have taken such a dislike to Salcombe Races. Last year she was quite the blithest of the party, and never missed one of the four days, if my memory is not at fault. Anthony Le Breton of Shotover, ran a horse that season, I recollect—a 'dark' horse, I think they called it—and lost a heap of money over the animal, everybody said. Come, Frank," lightly addressing the girl straight across the table—"why do not you like the raceweek now, my dear, eh?"

Sir Blount was fidgeting with his wine-glass. Penelope Cardew looked troubled and uneasy.

Both she and her father were wishing heartily that the subject of the Salcombe pandemonium had been left unmooted amongst them.

Poppy blamed herself angrily for having started it.

Francesca, however, raised her eyes fearlessly, though she was powerless to keep down the lovely hot colour from her cheeks.

"I am tired of it all," she answered steadily. "I have grown to perceive that there is much harm wrought at the races, and little enough good. I never wish to go to them again—I never shall."

Mrs. Barlow looked perplexedly from one to the other, putting up her eye-glasses the better to do so. She was possessed of but slight discernment.

Young Vereker lamented that his tutor's aunt was not gifted, indeed, with sufficient sense and penetration to hold her tongue just then.

Could not the woman tell, wondered Jim indignantly, that something in the Cardew family was evidently wrong?

Jim Vereker himself could see it plainly enough, if she could not; both take her and her stupid blundering!

"But Anthony Le Breton is gone to day, I know," Mrs. Barlow said next, stumbling as it were further and further on to delicate ground. "He went with those dreadful Wylders. Cuthbert saw him go past with them on that rowdy drag of theirs this morning. There were enough hampers and wine-cases, Cuthbert said, to stock half-a-dozen drags. I suppose that is the reason why Anthony Le Breton is not here with you this evening, Sir Blount!—his being with the Wylders, I mean?"

"H'm—ah, yes, ma'am—that is about it," Sir Blount Cardew answered awkwardly, looking down the cloth appealingly to his eldest daughter, who, swift to take a hint when she chose, prepared to rise from her seat.

"You are ready for some tea, I am sure, dear Mrs. Barlow!" said Augusta sweetly. "If so, we will retire."

Augusta Cardew's ill-humour was nearly gone. It was not unlikely, after all, she had thought, that the Reverend Cuthbert Masey, notwithstanding young Vereker's presence there, might call in at Cardew Court to escort his aunt home to the Vicarage across the park.

Oh, yes, Mrs. Barlow was ready for her tea, quite ready, and willingly quitted the dining-room with the girls and Jim.

This young man, being thoroughly at home with the Cardew family, and having a wholesome disinclination for wine-bibbing after dinner, never hesitated, when dining at the Court on an ordinary occasion like the present, to leave Sir Blount

—who, if he took any, had his coffee or tea sent in to him—in sole possession of the decanters, and to follow somewhat sheepishly in the wake of the vanishing ladies.

It was Anthony Le Breton who had first introduced Jim Vereker to the Cardews, and this fact in itself had been more than sufficient to ensure a lasting welcome for the lad all round.

The harum-scarum master of Shotover had been at Rugby with young Jim's elder brother; and so, when, about a year before, the ingenious youth had arrived at the Vicarage as the Reverend Cuthbert Masey's solitary pupil—unfortunately the Sparling Vicarage was neither a rich nor a spacious one—Anthony had lost no time in looking up the brother of his old Rugby "chum," and bringing the boy to be made much of by the Cardew girls at the Court.

Then Jim became speedily at home there with them all.

"What, going with the women as usual, Jim?" called out Sir Blount after him, laughing boisterously. "Petticoats before politics—is that your motto, my lad?"

"Yes—no, sir—I think so," answered the young fellow, random-wise, growing very red; and then floundering hopelessly over Poppy's pink train, he made his exit with what grace he could.

Sir Blount Cardew was nodding with his hand round the stem of his glass, the wide cool room was full of summer twilight shadow, when the Baronet opened his bleared eyes drowsily to see his daughter Francesca standing there sorrowfully by his chair.

"Why—why did her face look so gray and wan in the gloom? And was that a cup and saucer she carried in her hand?"

"Father," she said gently, nay, pleadingly, "I have brought in your coffee to you—it is nice and hot and strong, exactly as you like it, dear. Will you not drink it, father, whilst I wait, and then return to the drawing-room with me to hear Poppy sing us 'Love's Old Sweet Song'?"

Sir Blount took the cup with an unsteady hand, looking up the while with a vacant, fuddled stare at the tall white-robed figure motionless there in the gloaming.

"Coming in to hear Poppy sing! So, my girl, not to night, I think. I am quite comfortable here where I am, you tell Poppy," Sir Blount Cardew answered thickly and indistinctly. "Why," he went on, with a strangled hiccup, "pray, does not that young jackanapes Jim Vereker stay here a bit and keep me company? He'll never make a man like Anthony. It ain't in him, Frank—not in young Jim. Now, give me Anthony Le Breton—"

With a low, piteous, sobbing cry Francesca Cardew sank upon her knees by her father's chair, and held his hands tightly imprisoned within her own.

"Father," she said, brokenly, "it was very good of you to stay away from—the races all this week, just to humour me. But you know why I made the request; you know that I thought it would be setting some sort of better example to Anthony if—if we did not go ourselves to Salcombe. If we did not attend the Salcombe racecourse this year, I might, with some show of reason, ask him to remain at home with us. My plan—my hopes have succeeded until to-day; to-day I know that they have failed."

"Nevertheless it has not been all in vain, father—not all in vain, dear—and so now I want you to—to grant me—grant me something else—another fanciful request of mine. Will you?"

Still kneeling by his chair in the dusk, she stretched forth her hand to the table, and touched the decanter within nearest reach.

"In this," entreated Francesca, with passionate emphasis, and trembling all over in her terrible, loving eagerness—"in this—in this matter—oh, dearest father, forgive me!—I want you—nay, I pray you, I implore you with all my heart and soul to try to set a better, a nobler example to Anthony when he comes here to the Court for the future!"

"For his sake—for my sake, do what you can—all that lies in your power—to save him! Let us, between us, dear, try to hold him back from

perdition. I alone, unaided, can do so little. But you, father, if you will, can do so much more than I! Of late—and will you marvel that it should be so!—of late I have known rest neither by night nor by day for thinking of what we might do amongst us all for the salvation of Anthony Le Breton!

Francesca Cardew then rose from her knees as noiselessly as she had fallen upon them, and pressed her lips to Sir Blount's hot brow.

With a sob, not heard by him, she passed out through one of the long, open windows, and thus left him to himself again in the great darkening room to reflect on what she had been bold enough to say.

"Frank," spoke a humble, patient voice at her elbow by-and-by, "Frank, dear, why have you given us all the slip like this? Gussie has sent me out to look for you—she guessed that you had wandered out-of-doors somewhere. I caught sight of your white gown between the trees, and so managed to spot you here."

Francesca turned her head with a start to recognize the boyish, beardless, peach-face of Jim.

"Does Gussie want me particularly?" she inquired, with a forlorn little smile.

"Not that I know of, Frank," was the reply. "But—but I was very glad of any excuse that would send me after you, you know."

She said nothing; and resumed unconsciously the attitude he had surprised her in.

Francesca was leaning on the rather low-built ivied wall which, on the southern side of it, separated the park at Cardew Court from the public road, the Salcombe highway.

Hawthorn trees overshadowed the parapet, and mosses and ferns grew thickly at its base—a picturesque old wall, built when the Court itself was built.

The pale summer moon had risen high in the heavens; the broad white Salcombe road was as light as in the day-time almost. Out in the midst of a beautiful moonlit expanse of green sward, in the rear of Jim Vereker and Francesca Cardew, stood her charming old home, bright and hospitable-looking with its many lighted windows, but showing black and rather weird in patches here and there where the loving ivy had clung for years.

In a larch-copse hard by a nightingale was singing, but Frank himself heard scarcely a note of his liquid heart-breaking song.

CHAPTER II.

ONCE more was Francesca Cardew thinking, as indeed she had been thinking when Jim Vereker discovered her—poor honest Jim, whose proximity now she seemed wholly to have forgotten—of Anthony Le Breton; Anthony Le Breton, the wild master of Shotover.

As a boy, an only boy, spoilt utterly by the weakness of too-indulgent parents, Frank could remember that young Anthony Le Breton had been wild and unmanageable even then.

For generations, as everyone in the neighbourhood knew, the two families—that of Shotover and that of Cardew Court—had lived on terms of the most friendly and intimate kind, so that it was little wonder if young Anthony, in his madcap boyhood, should have spent much of his time with the daughters of his father's old neighbour and friend.

And even in those happy, bygone days Frank and Anthony had been great allies and comrades; she admiring immensely his straight and manly figure, his striking good looks, his daring and intrepid spirit; he in his turn, loyal as she, considering her the very best girl he knew.

The old gray lichen-grown Grange, known in the vicinity as Shotover, lay in fact much nearer to Salcombe than to Sparling; but Shotover's distance from Cardew Court had never in the slightest proved an obstacle to Anthony's frequent visits to Frank's home.

When school and college time had arrived for

Anthony in due course, those days of parting between the two used to be black-letter ones indeed! But the hour of re-union, when it came, was always doubly sweet to them for the months of enforced separation which had dragged themselves so slowly away.

When Anthony Le Breton came of age he had lost both his parents, and had in consequence succeeded without reserve or condition to a comfortable and well-managed estate. So he went abroad for two or three years, and left his inheritance to the care of aliens.

Then dark and ugly with a vengeance were some of the rumours and stories which, during those two or three years of so-called travel, had contrived to find their way through divers channels to his friends in Salcombe and Sparling.

Many and many a night had Frank's pillow been wet with a flood of unavailing tears, she grieving over some story or other of her hero's evil-doing far away from the forsaken home which now awaited his return in vain. For the strangers to whom he had let it were gone from Shotover; and the master's presence was sorely needed there.

At length Anthony came back, but things went on no better.

By-and-by strange visitors of both sexes appeared at the old Grange—jaunty-looking young men wearing an air of habitual dissipation about them; bold, loud, fashionably-dressed women with darkened eyebrows and golden hair.

Cards were used at orgies on the Sabbath Day, it was whispered, when the host and his guests were seldom sober.

Many an old friend that wished Anthony Le Breton well talked of giving him up as a hopeless case; but the Cardews themselves had remained staunch and true to him throughout, ever trusting that before long he would perceive and acknowledge the error of his ways.

In spite of his sins, his many backslidings, they had always a good and kind word for him; and this rare generosity of the Cardews touched in the end the careless heart of Anthony.

"After all, you know," the foolish but well-intentioned Baronet would go about saying everywhere, "young men will be young men and must sow their wild oats at some time or other. Anthony is no man's enemy but his own. Let the lad alone, I say, and he will pull up in time, depend upon it."

The hardened, reckless heart of the man, however, was touched surely and overcome at last.

And one day he had found Francesca Cardew alone, and had asked her point-blank if she would save him!

"With your dear love to watch over me and help me always, Frank," said he, with an almost pathetic humility, "I think I could mend—I do indeed—on my honour I do—and lead a better and a worthier life. You are a woman good and pure as an angel, and I feel a wretch to approach you in this fashion. Nevertheless, Frank dear, I do love you very, very dearly; and—and if only—"

But Francesca stopped him, and told him very gravely, yet with a sudden and wondrous light in her beautiful brave sweet eyes, that she had cared for him always—yes, always, even when he was a boy—and that now with the help of Heaven they would try together, and he should be a better man.

Amongst other things, more recently, she had got him to promise her that he would shun this summer the Salcombe Races.

So much horrible betting and senseless drinking might always be found at the race-course, she urged gently; there were so many pitfalls in the place, she was certain, awaiting the easily tempted. Besides, had he not lost a small fortune already over his horses and trainers and other expensive hobbies at Shotover!

No, said Frank emphatically, he must stay away from Salcombe. They would not go thither themselves that year, and so Anthony must avoid the town likewise.

After a little hesitation—a little rebellion, in fact—Anthony Le Breton had yielded to Frank's decree; and the first three days of the great Salcombe holiday were spent by him with the girls at Cardew Court.

But on the fourth and last day he had broken unexpectedly through the good resolve; Francesca, with deepest sorrow, having received on that very morning, a hasty scrawl informing her that Anthony was going to the races at Salcombe.

Returning from Cardew Court on the foregoing night, it appeared, he had called on the Wylders of Bearpark—a family of considerable notoriety in the county—and somehow or other they had persuaded Anthony Le Breton to join their party for the following day. That was, for the Friday.

On Saturday, he promised Francesca in the note, he would come over without fail to Cardew Court and explain to her how it was that he could not "get out of it"—meaning his having joined the Bearpark people.

Frank, however, was not wholly unacquainted with the Wylder girls and their brother—all the countryside indeed had heard of Dick and Lucy Wylder.

Anthony might spare himself his explanation when he came next morning.

Over all this, then, was Francesca Cardew brooding with leaden, aching heart, in an utter weariness and dejection of spirit that could find no expression in words, when Jim Vereker discovered her by the low ivied wall watching, with those shadowed, troubled eyes of hers, the white moonlit road upon the other side.

The lad's patience gave way at last; and he touched Francesca's shoulder to rouse her from her apathy.

"Are not you coming in, Frank?" said he wistfully. "Presently, else, we shall have someone coming out to hunt for me."

She turned to him again then, and shook off with an effort the sense of leaden hopelessness which was oppressing her soul so drearily to-night.

"I am very rude, Jim," said she, smiling a little—"forgive me, will you? I believe I was half asleep and dreaming. To confess the truth, I am scarcely myself this evening. I—I have a tiresome headache, you know."

"Yes, I do know—I have seen how it is," young Vereker answered in low eager tones vibrating with suppressed feeling; tones, accents that Francesca more than once before had listened to from him, unwillingly enough, however. "And you have been crying too, I can very plainly see. You are unhappy. Oh, Frank, dear!" cried the boy boldly, "if you could only understand how wretched it makes me to see your dear eyes thus—how I long to comfort—"

She checked him quickly, almost sternly.

"Hush! you forget yourself curiously, Jim—forget what is due to me as the promised wife of Anthony Le Breton! Months ago, you must remember, I told you that your dream was worse than idle, and that it was very, very foolish of a boy like you"—young Vereker winced and made a gesture of impatience—"to tell me such impossible things, though, at the same time, very good of you, Jim, and true, and unselfish," added Frank, more kindly. "Still," she continued gently, "you must surely possess the discernment, the right sense to perceive that if it was all wrong and impossible then, it is doubly wrong and futile now! You must not mind my speaking plainly like this," said Frank, "because you know, Jim, I am older than you, and feel towards you exactly as an elder sister might. Indeed, if we could have had a brother, I would have had him just like you, Jim dear—I mean it. Now there's Poppy; why not—"

So she was going on impulsively, but checked herself in time, feeling that she was scarcely justified, after all, in compromising the name of Penelope.

"What of Poppy?" said Jim innocently, yet looking around him somewhat apprehensively in the gloom. "Is she coming?"

"No, no, no!" Frank hastened to say. "I was thinking—I only meant— Now promise me," she broke off, with some embarrassment, "that you will never again repeat the offence. All semblance of friendship between me and you, Jim, must cease in the future if you ever pain me so again. Remember!"

"Do you recollect, Frank," said Jim, with

moody irrelevancy, "what somebody or other says in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*!"

"I am your spaniel; . . . The more you beat me, I will fawn on you; Use me but as your spaniel—spurn me, strike me, Neglect me, love me, only give me leave, Unworthy as I am, to follow you!"

"Jim, you are indeed very foolish," said Francesca, with more of pity than of anger in her voice.

"At any rate," observed he, doggedly and perversely, "my love for you, Frank, is every whit as deep and trustworthy, perhaps deeper and trustworthier and surer altogether than that which Anthony Le Breton—"

"Jim, you are hateful! I will not listen to another word!"

She was about to move away from the lad in gravest displeasure, when that sound for which she had been waiting and listening so intently, with so wearied a patience and persistency, just in this very moment of Jim Vereker's transgressing smote on Francesca's ear.

Other vehicles of all and every description, from Salcombe, had passed along the road more than two hours before.

The Wylders' drag was invariably the last to return; something always seemed to detain them in the vicinity of the raccourse until the summer moon had well lit up the dewy way home.

And Francesca Cardew was aware of this—poor, wounded, loving, jealous Frank!

Involuntarily she shrank back into the deepest shadow of the hawthorn trees.

On reeled the dusty heavy drag, closely packed with gaily-dressed figures, the men's white hats and dust coats, and field-glasses, and the bright wraps of the women, all showing out distinctly by the clear pale light of the moon.

Loud laughter and cigar-smoke together were wafted afar on the cool night air, seeming to mull the dewy fragrance of the aftermath.

Francesca could see that Richard Wylder himself was behind in the body of the drag with his sisters and the rest of the party, and that it was Anthony Le Breton who was handling the reins and occupying the box-seat, with the notorious Lucy Wylder crouching close to his side.

Frank even caught a glimpse of the sheen of yellow hair as the head of the girl rested against Anthony Le Breton's arm. On the low back steps—probably drunk—were perched the drowsy grooms, presumably keeping guard over the empty hampers.

They were all gone the next minute, a cloud of dust following them—the rumbling of the wheels, the voices, the noisy laughter, dying gradually away in the distance beyond the park of Cardew Court.

Francesca shivered.

"Come," she said abruptly to Jim Vereker, "let us go."

Together they retraced their steps over the short damp green-ward in the direction of the lighted windows now immediately facing them.

Both were silent.

Somehow it seemed to sensitive young Jim that Frank resented his having been a witness with himself to that spectacle which had just disappeared down the road, and he wanted to tell her how vexed he was that it should have happened so, and how sorry he felt for her, and how utterly he detested those wretched Wylder people.

But for the life of him Jim knew not how to give expression to his thoughts and sensations of the moment, without incurring, perhaps, the risk of a deeper resentment still.

So he wisely held his peace.

Neither could he summon up sufficient courage to offer her a friendly arm.

"Frank," he nevertheless blurted out, as they approached the low green rail and sunk-fence which divided the flower-garden from the park, "I—I didn't mean, Frank, you know, to—"

"Well!" said Frank quietly.

"I—I, you know, that is, I—I couldn't help—"

continued young Vereker incoherently.

"Hush! It does not matter, Jim. We will forget it," said Francesca gently. "See, there is Gussie at the window! What is she saying?"

"Where in the world have you two been!" called out Miss Cardew, in her slow, distinct, rather severe way. "Mr. Masey is here, Frank! Really it was too bad of you to roam off by yourself like that! Where have you been, I ask!"

"We have been listening to the nightingale together," Jim Vereker made haste to reply, so as to spare Francesca herself the trouble of answering her sister—"and we both forgot the time, I fancy. I say, Gussie, isn't it a glorious night! Look—there's the new planet—over that clump of oaks yonder—that all the learned wisecracks are writing and talking about just now!"

"Yes," Miss Cardew struck in coolly, "I know. But come in now, if you please, Jim. Mr. Masey is in the drawing-room—waiting for you to go home."

Francesca Cardew and Anthony Le Breton were strolling side by side under the oaks in her father's park.

He had ridden over from Shotover, as he had promised Frank in his note that he would do, and, although as yet quite early, he had found her waiting for him by the iron rail and sunk fence of the flower-garden—herself the fairest flower in that bright *parterre*.

Francesca, seeing him coming up the avenue, had issued from the slender green iron gate which opened upon the park-land, and met him with a grave questioning smile beneath the cool oak boughs.

She was not the woman to hail a truant lover with a torrent of conventional reproaches. The past was past.

He looked so handsome, so straight-built and manly, such a genial, pleasant fellow withal, as he rode towards her in the fresh morning sunlight, with his head thrown a little back, and a tender, half-sorrowful light shining in the beautiful dark-blue eyes she loved so well, that all faintly-lingering resentment took wings as it were at his approach in her very gladness of heart to behold him with her again.

He sprang to the green-sward, and left his horse to itself. The animal of its own accord, after grazing a mouthful or two of the sweet moist daisied grass, stalked soberly round to the stable-yard alone. Grandee could have found his way blindfold, his master well knew, about the premises and precincts of Cardew Court.

Then Anthony at once set about making what he called his "peace" with Frank, and talked lamely enough about not deserving her "forgiveness." But Francesca had determined to be generous, and refused to listen to his self-exculpation; declaring loyally—and she quite believed at the time that she was speaking only the truth—that he, Anthony, was not so much to blame, perhaps, after all.

"I know how great must have been the temptation before you consented, dear," Francesca said steadily, beating down nobly the rising demon in her heart—he should not see how despicably jealous she was growing if she could help it—"too great, unfortunately. Had it been anyone else, other than the Wylders, of course I should have felt it more, dear Anthony," and she smiled bravely up into his eyes. "But you see I know of old what the Bearpark people are," added Frank.

"Yes, they have such a way with them, have they not?" said Anthony eagerly. "It is always so difficult to say 'No' to those girls, Frank. They seem to sweep a fellow clean off his feet as it were, don't you know?"

Francesca knew. She sighed. And insensibly she clung more closely to Anthony's arm, through which she had linked her own.

How dear, how inexpressibly, how terribly dear he was to her, was the feeling uppermost in her soul at the moment. There was nothing in life, no matter how arduous, she would not attempt in his behalf, and for his dear sake, if her perseverance and self-sacrifice might only be crowned by the proof of his salvation in the end!

Nevertheless, though she had forgiven freely enough Anthony himself, she could find in her

heart no kindly thought of condonation for those people at Bearpark, Dick and Lucy Wylder in particular, who had been the means—so Frank would have it—of Anthony's breaking through his good resolve.

(To be continued.)

HELEN'S DILEMMA.

—301—

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AND what has Helen Brown been doing all this time! How has she been amusing herself whilst her quondam lover has been exploring Brazilian forests, Mexican mines, and breaking brittle hearts!

August and September were passed in the most orthodox fashion at a very gay French watering-place in company with Mr. and Mrs. Towers—stolid minded, practical, unimaginative colonials, whose eyes were opened in stony amazement at many of the curious sights which came under their notice for the first time at Trouville.

But after a while they became quite accustomed to the jauntily-attired ladies and gentlemen who disported themselves together in the sea. In very *voyante* costumes, and the absence of all grace of any kind.

They enjoyed themselves extremely in their own particular way; enjoyed the brilliant weather, the gay, ever-varying crowd, the excellent tabled *hôte*, and a general sense of delicious, luxurious idleness—idleness that was in itself even praiseworthy, for were they not all recouping their shattered energies, and doing vast things for their constitutions in drinking in quantities of the very best ozone, whilst they sat in oddly-shaped hooded chairs on the hard yellow sands, and saw London and Paris and Vienna bathing, and flirting, and strolling before their much occupied eyes!

Lord Leeborough has made his way to Trouville also, and found out Miss Helen Brown, where she sits on the sands under the shelter of a scarlet umbrella, with a Tauchnitz novel, face downwards, in her lap, gazing out on the bright blue glassy sea, on the white-sailed boats, and on the distant horizon with far-away, dreamy eyes!

Of whom is she thinking! Certainly not of the young man who is rapidly approaching her with a gait and an expression that assures all lookers on that he is confident of being warmly welcomed by the "Belle Anglaise," who is at present secluded from the public eye beneath her capacious parapluie.

The public eye resents the enormous dimensions of that brightly-tinted shelter, for the public eye admires "la jeune demoiselle Anglaise" with sincere appreciation.

"How d'ye do, Miss Brown!" says a voice that Helen recognizes, not with any emotion of either annoyance or pleasure. "Mrs. Towers told me I should find you down here, sunning yourself near the sea."

"Oh, Lord Leeborough!" holding out a very prettily-gloved hand, "how do you do! Where did you drop from?"

"From Havre," he replied, seating himself carefully on the sand beside her. "The Smiths-White brought me over in their yacht from Southampton, the *Camilla*. They have come for the regatta, and are staying at Frascati, so I just ran over here in the steamer—only twenty minutes, you know. And how do you like Trouville?"

"Oh, I like it; it is very cheerful and sunny, and there is always something going on," with a little yawn, decently concealed by the Tauchnitz.

"One place seems pretty much the same to you as another, Miss Brown," exclaimed the *blond* young nobleman in an aggrieved voice, digging little holes angrily in the sand with the end of his immaculate cane. "You don't care about London, nor the country, nor the sea-side," he proceeded, in a tone of irritated interrogation, but no answer was vouchsafed to his remark.

Miss Brown's beautifully-cut lips were closed

and her eyes were again dreamily fixed on the horizon.

"I suppose if your company is to your liking it makes all the difference!" he continued, poking deeper and still deeper into the sand.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Helen, abstractedly. "Oh, I beg your pardon. I was not thinking of what I was saying!"

"No, you were not even listening," responded Tavy, indignantly.

There were not many girls who would see a lord literally and figuratively at their feet with such stoical, such rude indifference, such unnatural insouciance.

"I wish I could persuade you to care for my society," he continued, in a low, insinuating voice. "I wouldn't make half a bad husband!"

In this form and in this graceful language was the Leasborough coronet tendered for Helen's acceptance.

"No, perhaps not," replied Helen, shifting her umbrella a little, and surveying her companion with a cool, dispassionate gaze.

"Suppose you try," he suggested, raising himself on his elbow, and looking up into her face with unusual animation, and with all the battery of persuasion that his eyes could muster.

"Thank you very much; but I am not disposed to change my present state," replied the young lady, with a laugh, affecting to treat the whole matter as a joke.

"I assure you that I am awfully fond of you, Helen!" said her suitor, raising himself to a sitting posture, and endeavouring (under the friendly shelter of the red umbrella) to possess himself of one of her pretty little hands. "Don't you care for me one little bit?"

"No, not one little bit in the way you mean," replied Helen, pushing back her chair so suddenly and so unexpectedly that her companion very nearly fell prostrate on the sands, and measured his length at her feet.

"Then there's some other fellow," he urged, standing erect, and dusting the sand from the knees of his trousers. "Who is he?"

"That is a question you have no right to ask; but I assure you that there is no one else."

Oh! Helen! Was it the reflection of the umbrella or was it a sudden suffusion of natural colour that made her face assume for an instant a pretty rosy tint?

No; there certainly was no one else now, she told herself, emphatically; and, as far as her feelings were any guide, there would never be any one again. No, never.

Thus Lord Leasborough pleaded his suit in vain that day upon the sands of Trouville. Vainly he urged his mother's anxiety, her aunt's warm support, Mrs. Towers's best wishes! The fair lady at his side carried her head very erect under her red umbrella, and was deaf as the traditional adder.

But Tavistock was persistent. He could not, and would not, take no. The more unwilling Miss Brown was to listen the more eager he was to be heard.

"When Mr. and Mrs. Towers return to Tasmania you will be practically alone!" he observed. "You will have no home of your own, and I shall come again, and offer you mine. After Christmas I shall certainly come again!"

To this Helen made no reply. Silence is so easy at times, and according to all proverbs, ancient and modern, silence is so wise! But did she fail to remember one adage at this crucial moment? Apparently she had forgotten that "silence gives consent."

And with this kind of consent Lord Leasborough was perfectly satisfied. He paid his respects to Mr. and Mrs. Towers, he visited the *Établissement*, he partook of a most excellent dinner, and returned to Havre by the last boat, in the best-nay, the most buoyant—of spirits!

CHAPTER XXXVII

TOWARDS the end of December the Towers were again in London. They had been nearly a year in England, and were seriously discussing their return to Tasmania in the spring.

At times Helen was half inclined to accompany them. What had she to detain her in England?

"Many friends, and not a few lovers," the popular voice would have promptly replied.

Yes; but were these not fair-weather friends? she asked herself; and was not a grain of that friendship born on the banks of the Derwent better than a whole peck of this English substitute?

Why not return to the scenes of her childhood? Why not forget her year of misery—her other year of false, hollow unsatisfying gaiety, and live again a life of sweet, uneventful, arcanian simplicity?

Katie might accompany her. Katie was now better than she had been for years, and, excepting by her father, Katie was not appreciated at home.

This idea, this notion of returning to the Colonies, was derided and scouted by all who heard the subject mentioned.

Even Mr. and Mrs. Towers set their faces against it. Helen was to remain in England—it was always her father's intention.

But where was she to stay? She did not like to put the question to her little circle point blank, but it frequently forced itself to her own notice.

Was she, a girl of two-and-twenty, to set up housekeeping alone? No; that would never do. Was she to return and live with her aunt, Mrs. Despard? That alternative would be still worse.

What they really hoped and expected was this—that ere they had sailed she would have stepped into a more exalted sphere, and give them the gratifying news to carry to their friends that their late protégée and ward had become a peeress of England and Lady Leasborough!

The news of Sir Rupert's "escapade" had begun to be talked about, whispered about, and written about.

It came to Helen's ears in various ways. It had been smiled about, and hinted at, at a little tea; and a very piquantly-worded, curiously-compelling paragraph had found a corner in one of the society papers.

Then, besides all this, had she not a nice long letter from her cousin Blanche?

"MY DEAREST HELEN,—

"What a wretch you are! You have not written to me for ages—you really are a most abominable correspondent. I want you to call at Madame Jabot's, like a good soul, and see if she has cleaned and mended my lace and mother's founce, the point d'Alençon.

"Do write, like a dear, and tell me about the fashions; for, although I was in town a month ago, the cut of winter paletots was very undecided; and I am writing to Madame Paufier about a new coat.

"Should it be long and tight-fitting? Do the best people wear stamped velvet or plain, or ribbed silk, or what? And, of course, I shall have fur—that is your winter rig out.

"When are you coming down to us? Katie is panting to see you. She is much better, and able to get about wonderfully well. That imp Loo-Loo is going to school, thank the kind fates.

"She is off to Brussels on the 5th January. Papa is to take her, but I would not mind betting even money that she bolts en route.

"She has spent her time in floods of tears ever since the matter was settled. Serves her right—horrid young monkey—for anything to equal her temper and her tongue, and the way she behaved to her late governess, I could not describe to you. You were very sly about Tavy Leasborough. I heard he went over to Trouville—all the way to see you—and you gave him the cold shoulder! My dear girl, if you saw what a jolly old place Leasborough Park is, and its capabilities with your taste—and if you saw the family diamonds (strange to say not yet pawned!) you would never.

"And really Tavy is not half a bad young man, as men go—devoted to you—inclined to be domestic; and you could turn him round your pretty little finger, I know!

"Talking of bad young men, have you heard of Rupert's escapade? Still waters run deep!

"We had a letter from Captain Torrens, making as light of the whole affair as possible, evidently awfully anxious to hush it up; but I am afraid that it is known far and wide, in spite of his friendly intentions.

"It seems that Rupert carried on tremendously with some pretty Spanish girl, and refused to make the *amende honorable*—in other words, to marry her—but wished to love and ride away. Al!

"However, one of her brothers came to the front—furious, of course—and demanded satisfaction on behalf of his sister; and Rupert very reluctantly was obliged to fight a duel, and was badly wounded in the lungs. I believe he has paid up a heap of money to the family, and they have decided to hush the matter up; but it is a very bad business altogether, much worse than what I have told you!

"I don't suppose Rupert will show his face in England for some time. I hear that Captain Torrens is coming home alone.

"My tea is cooling this ten minutes, so goodbye. Mother and Katie and the red-eyed Loo-Loo send their love, in which I join.—Ever your affectionate cousin,

BLANCHE DESPARD.

"P.S.—You might think twice of Tavy!"

On receipt of this amiable effusion, Helen did not cast one single mental glance towards Lord Leasborough, his park, or his diamonds, but she thought a great deal on the subject of the other young man mentioned in the letter—of that bad young baronet, Sir Rupert Lynn.

She could hardly credit the tale, and she distrusted Blanche's confidences; but in this case—alas! were they not corroborated by the open-mouthed purveyors of scandal?

And even—if appearances were not to be trusted—if the case was not quite so bad as it seemed, was there not an old proverb that said, "There is never smoke without fire"?

There must have been some smoke; and even the very faintest doubt would be amply sufficient to show that he had forgotten her. Yes, if he still cared for her he was the last man in the world to get up meaningless flirtations with dark-eyed, coquettish, fan-wielding senoritas!

After she had allowed the subject to rankle in her mind for nearly a week she began to take Blanche's advice, and to think twice of Tavy.

Tavy had some things to recommend him. He could give her a home. By marrying him she would please her friends. She would show Sir Rupert Lynn that she was not disposed to wait for his tardily-offered allegiance, nor to wear the willow!

And Tavy was good-tempered, good-natured, easy to get on with, not jealous nor exacting; and certainly, it must be confessed, not overburdened with brains.

Still, a very clever husband might not be an unalloyed blessing!

Sir Rupert indisputably had plenty of brains, but he was jealous, distrustful, exacting, hot-tempered, and, worse than all, inconstant.

Yes, Blanche was very nearly right, but not quite. No, Helen, with all her newly-sharpened indignation, could not yet bring herself to call him *bad*.

The Towers and their beautiful ward are spending a week in a large, fashionable, and very favourite country house. They are bound on a series of these visits, that will carry them over the next four weeks.

Helen's big wicker-trunks, and the lovely frocks inside them, are indeed a sight to see; but Helen herself is apathetic, and cold, and inanimate, and takes but little interest in the various amusements that are set going for the entertainment of the young people.

The only thing she cares about is riding; and, greatly to Mrs. Towers's horror, she goes out hunting no less than twice a-week, duly chaperoned by Mr. Towers himself; and the colonial young lady goes across country in a highly praiseworthy manner, and in a style that brings tears of envy from her cousin Blanche's light orbs as she remains perforce among the mob on the hard, high road.

Blanche would give her hair to be able to follow her cousin—the Tasmanian Diana. But, alas! Blanche has neither nerve nor experience, and Blanche must simply say to herself,—

"Be still, my heart! be still!"

Captain Torrens has arrived at Baroncourt, arrived on a certain dark, misty evening; just in time to dress for dinner and present himself and his immense expanse of white shirt-front in the drawing-room just before that important meal. He gazed appreciatively round the bright luxuriant apartment as he stood before one of the fireplaces, with his back to the logs, and witnessed one pretty girl after another come sailing into the room in all the bewildering beauty of a lovely dinner toilet, but not one of these *houris* who had gone before was like the divinity who has entered last—a divinity in the very palest blue damask satin, with large diamond flies sparkling among her thick golden-brown hair, and as it is to have the happiness of taking this too bewitching-looking young lady into dinner—this Miss Brown.

"Not much of a name," he says to himself, as he unfolds his napkin and arranges his glasses previous to discussing his soup.

After the soup he refreshes himself with a glass of sherry and a good look at his fair neighbour.

"Brown may be her name, but she has good blood in her veins—the outline of her perfect profile, her small ears, the shape of her hands, all loudly call out in their own way 'blue blood.'"

But she is silent—not disposed to talk—not inclined to amuse him. He pulls his long tawny moustache reflectively, and asks himself if, as she is a beauty and an heiress, she is not standing on her privilege, and expecting him to entertain her.

Well, he will see about it after the joint; and until then their conversation is monosyllabic.

Then they plunge into the topic of the pantomime, the late runs with the foxhounds, some recent grand wedding in high life; but Miss Brown avoids, as she would the pestilence, the name of Brazil, or any allusion to foreign countries.

However, a little old gentleman opposite, with a bald head, and a very sharp face, is by no means so reticent.

Helen has seen him listening—all eagerness—and evidently most anxious to get in a word for nearly five minutes.

At last he sees his chance, and leaning across the table, says to Captain Torrens,—

"By the way, Torrens, what did you do with Lynn?"

"Oh! I left him at St. Thomas," returned that gentleman, placidly; "he was in no hurry to get home, and I was."

"Ah!" exclaimed the little old gentleman, wrinkling up his nose in an unpleasant smile; "you had no attractions out there, and he had. That was a nice business about the Spanish girl, Lynn's a good-looking fellow, and, by all accounts, played the deuce among the *senoras*," he concluded, with a hard, old laugh that seemed to come from the back of his head.

His heart was now merry with wine, and he was disposed to be both loquacious and indiscreet; but his efforts at drawing out Captain Torrens were nipped by that young man in the bud.

He affected temporary deafness and turned his entire attention to his fair companion. How pale she was—curiously pale.

It was rather becoming to her statuesque-looking profile, this excessive pallor; but certainly he had imagined that she possessed some colour when he had been presented to her before dinner!

They talked the usual dinner-table common-places, and more than once it occurred to him that Miss Brown had opened her mouth as if to speak; but that, by some curious process, the words she wished to utter had died away on her lips.

It never occurred to him for a moment that she knew, or even took the smallest interest in, his late fellow traveller, Sir Rupert Lynn; and that she sat by his side outwardly a lovely placid-

looking, perfectly-composed, and well-bred young lady—and inwardly a living, devouring fire of aching anxiety to hear from his lips the true bare facts of what led to his friend's duel—how that friend was? and when he might be expected in England?

Pride closed her mouth; still the society of Captain Torrens had an extraordinary fascination for the fair Helen.

She hovered round and round the topic of his Brazilian experiences as a moth does round a candle; but, as yet, she had never rushed into the flame with any direct or self-incriminating inquiries.

She was very lovely, he thought—very clever and intelligent, and marvellously interested in his late experiences.

She was well read, and quite up in the physical geography of South America; she had read the conquests of Peru and Mexico, and many recent books of travel; and was altogether a singularly well informed young lady!

He never imagined for a moment that she had a special interest in that part of the globe, or that her studies were the effect of which his journey to the West had been the cause!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Two or three evenings later the Nimrods and Dianas of the party were seated in the old oak panelled Hall, drawn round a blazing log fire, and sipping fragrant hot tea; and discussing the late run, and exchanging experiences to the languidly interested amusement of various daintily tea-gowned figures, who were sunken in various luxurious low chairs, and thought that hunting, especially for women, was a kind of mild, mental disease.

How much pleasanter to sit at home over a good fire and an interesting novel this bitter winter-day than to go tearing across country, over horrid fences and ploughed land, on a hard-pulling horse like Miss Kentish and Miss Brown—who had just joined the refused circle, with cool rosy faces, muddy habits, and an air of intensely aggravating self-satisfaction.

They had both ridden very straight indeed, and earned the acclamations of their gentlemen friends, and the plaudits of their own esteem, and were now fully prepared for the gentle delacements of tea and conversation.

Helen sank into a comfortable low cushioned seat, removed her hat, and accepted tea and hot cake from Captain Torrens' respectful hands; and that gentleman, having provided for himself, speedily found accommodation beside her, and commenced a series of criticisms and remarks about their capital run from Oddingtons Gorse. Another gentleman, a young guardaman, tea-cup in hand, showed a very amiable (and perhaps not unnatural) desire to share in the delights of Helen's conversation, and drawing a chair gently into her neighbourhood subsided therein.

They talked of hunting, of hounds, of horses; and, finally, of hunting men, and young Mr. Spiller was loud in his encomiums on the riding of a certain Tommy Pratt.

"I saw him take the iron gate into the turnpike road without winking. I don't know when I saw such a beggar to ride! Lynn is another of the same pattern; but he has done no hunting this year. He has taken to be a regular globe trotter," contemptuously.

"Ah, well! I dare say he will be here for the tail end of the season, and show you the way still," said Captain Torrens, encouragingly.

"By Jove! Torrens," returned the other, somewhat irreverently, "that was a curious affair out in Brazil. I never heard the in-and-outs of it—what was it all about? I can't fancy Lynn, of all people, playing the romantic serenading duelling dog!"

"My dear fellow, if I have told the story once, I have twenty times. Only this very morning I was button-holed by that terrible bore, Eyre Hall, and interviewed by him with as much pertinacity and insistence as if he had been an American reporter."

"Well, 'tis nearly all the same. He is the

greatest gossip in town; and whatever you have told him will be in the smoking-room of every club in London before the week is out. 'Hear All,' as they call him, is better than any newspaper!" said Mr. Spiller, with an air of deep conviction. "I hope you remembered that when you gave him your confidence."

"I did, you may swear. It seems that the people over here have quite got hold of the wrong end of the stick, so it was just as well to tell the old boy, and let him start a fresh story."

"And what is the story?" said Mr. Spiller, rising to take Helen's cup—her hand was shaking, she was literally quivering with repressed excitement, and with an agonising thirst for details.

"Do tell us!" encouragingly, as he resumed his seat. "It will give our appetites a gentle flip, won't it, Miss Brown?" The true and accurate account of how a very cool and collected fellow of our acquaintance went off to see the world, fell in love with a pretty Brazilian, and fought a duel on her account! Come now, Torrens, begin; make it as interesting as you can, and polish it up with a bit of local colouring."

"It has been too much polished up and coloured already," said the other, crossing his legs and speaking in a tone of smothered irritation. "It has been improved out of all recognition. The facts of the case are these—but, perhaps, turning to Helen, 'this is rather a bore to you!'"

"Not at all," she answered, with nervous haste. "Go on!" very eagerly; "tell us all about the duel—so unusual—so—most interesting," she stammered.

"Well," proceeded Captain Torrens, joining the tips of his fingers together, leaning back in his chair and speaking oratorically.

"Lynn and I went out to Rio together, and a man out there connected with our mine put us up. He was very friendly and hospitable, and had two extremely pretty daughters."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Spiller, with much significance.

"Well," pursued the other, equably; "we went off, explored, prospected, travelled, and came back to Rio at the end of four months, and were received with open arms by Senor Carvalho's household—"

"Ah!—dear me—you don't say so!" again interrupted Mr. Spiller, with ironical amusement; and Helen, with a sudden little restless jerk of her elbow, displaced a book on a neighbouring table, which fell with a sullen, soft bang to the floor.

"These *senoritas* were very delightful—they made a great deal of us—they rode with us, danced with us, star-gazed with us, and taught us how to flirt!"

"I should not think that you had much to learn in that line," laughed Mr. Spiller; "but Lynn—how did he get on? Was he a promising pupil?"

"No—not specially so. No; he did not act up to his opportunities. He was a passive victim, and the unlucky young lady, instead of subduing him to her yoke, fell into the snare herself, and became most foolishly and flagrantly in love with the stony-hearted Englishman!"

"*Apris!*" demanded Mr. Spiller, with an air of wrapt attention, and gently raised eyebrows.

"*Apris!* Well, I believed she bothered the very life out of Lynn—and he was dying to out the whole concern and come home, but my affairs delayed us. I believe one of the *senoritas* adored was furiously jealous—a little naturally, perhaps, seeing that she had no longer eyes, or ears, or tongue for any of her own compatriots—and he sought a quarrel."

"Lynn was ready—foolishly ready to oblige him—and they fought. He was a regular little sweep—a common, under-bred blackguard, not worth steel—but Lynn was the challenged; he would have his way, and they fought one early morning by the banks of the Rio Grande. The Brazilian was a notorious duellist—a splendid swordsman—and, after meeting with a cool, steady resistance that nearly drove him mad, he ran Lynn right through the lungs, and went off laughing!"

"The Carralhos were in an awful state. They wanted to nurse the wounded man, of course.

but we had had enough of *Senorita Inez*, and I carried him off to the steamer on the spot. Fine work we had among us to bring him round, too. He was in a very bad way for days, and quite off his head at times; however, when we parted at St. Thomas he was fairly convalescent, and able to crawl out and sit in the sun. He means to come home by the States, he tells me."

"And you mean to say that he did not care about the girl?" inquired Mr. Spiller, with round-eyed amazement, and an expression of mildly subdued unbelief.

"No more than you do," returned the other, with warm asseveration; "no more"—turning to where Helen sat, with straining ears but veiled eyes—"no more," triumphantly, "than he cares for Miss Brown!"

A rich flood of crimson suffused Miss Brown's cheeks at this declaration—a flood that started from the little white collar round her throat, and concluded among the roots of her hair.

"And why was he so hard-hearted?" asked Mr. Spiller, judiciously. "Come now, he must have had some reason!"

"Well, I think there was—you won't mention this!" mysteriously—"some girl at home, I believe!"

"Who? I did not see him paying special attention to any one last season; he is not much of a society man."

"I don't know who she is, or was; but this I can tell you," proceeded Captain Torrens, who was certainly "very garrulously given;" "he was awfully down on his luck when we left England, and for the first month or so in Brazil—something on his mind, and not a word to throw to a dog!—and he used to be such a cheery fellow."

"Looked as if he was in love," said Mr. Spiller, with a laugh. "Eh? Miss Brown, what do you say?" appealing to Helen, with a broad grin.

But Helen was past all power of distinct utterance, and a ghastly imitation of his own smile was her only reply.

"And this was confirmed," he proceeded, dropping his voice confidentially; "when we were at sea, and he was delirious—for, at other times, he was very reserved and close about his affairs—but when he was off his head he was constantly muttering about some letter," very impressively. "Always asking for it—if it had come. It was really painful to listen to him, and to witness his anxiety; he would declare, over and over again, that it had come, and I was keeping it from him, and all sorts of things. He used to try and get up and search for it—and, altogether, was so mad on this one subject that I made up a counterfeit effusion—directed it in a lady's hand—sealed it—and gave it to him at last, to be rid of his incessant and wearisome questions!"

"Well!" inquired the other gentleman, with raised brows; "did that calm him?"

"Partly. He was too weak to open it, or read it; so I put it under his head; and he was quite content as long as he felt it in his hand."

"Poor beggar! And are you sure it was a letter from a woman—maybe it was about money, just as likely—and from a man?"

"You may be right!" replied Captain Torrens, with a little sarcastic bow; "but I have never yet met a man of the name of *Helen*!"

"Oh! was that her name! And, when he came to his senses, what did he think of the little joke you played on him about her letter—about the dummy one, eh?"

"Oh, when he began to come round, I just slipped it away when he was asleep. I fancied one day that I saw him searching for it; but no doubt, poor fellow, he fancied he *dreamt* it."

"And, of course, you never undeceived him—eh?"

"Need you ask!" returned Captain Torrens, contemptuously.

"Well, it was a very interesting recital on the whole!" turning to Helen. "Was it not, Miss Brown?"

"Oh—very!" she replied, with a vast effort—an effort that was not noticed by her companions. To them she had merely appeared silent, preoccupied, and uninterested.

"Torrens, Lady Darville is calling you—don't you see her gestures of appeal! You had better

go and see what she wants—and I'll take your chair!"

"Now, Miss Brown," continued Mr. Spiller, in a tone of friendly confidence; "did you ever hear such a sieve in all your life as that fellow? He is as bad as old Hall."

"I think Lynn showed a vast amount of discretion in keeping his affairs to himself—and, from what I know of him, he would be in a towering passion if he dreamt that Torrens had been lifting the veil from his little heart secrets for our amusement—of course being all safe with us. You don't know Lynn, I suppose? Awfully nice fellow—often wondered what he saw in that chattering idiot!"

"Oh! are you going? No doubt you must be rather anxious to get rid of your habit, so I won't press you to stay; but this half-hour before dressing is just the most deadly time in the day! I hate it like poison! I am too sleepy to read—too hungry to talk—"

"Well!" rising, and picking up her whip politely; "*au revoir*!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HELEN'S mind was in a perfect tumult when she reached her room. She did not ring for her maid, nor divest herself of her habit; she merely sat before the fire, with her hands locked round her knees, her eyes intent on the hot coals, and her whole heart given up to a raging conflict between doubt and joy.

If he expected a letter really, and it was not a mere species of mental crane, he must have written to her. Where, then, was the letter?

Ah! she was soon to know—although not within the very hour—that it lay in a safe retirement in *Blanche's* dressing-case. It *must* have been her letter!

She was in his mind—she, and no one else. This was the conviction she came to, as at last she reluctantly brought her day-dreams to a close, and rose and rang for her hand-maiden.

Never had her fellow-guests seen Miss Brown look so lovely or so animated as she did that evening; and why? Because Miss Brown's heart felt light, and the state of her mind was reflected in her face!

As I have said before, Miss Despard was not much of a horsewoman. She had the ambition to shine in the hunting field, but she lacked two very necessary items—skill and courage.

A very tame, sedate steed had always been apportioned to her; but on one fine sunny morning the host returned from his usual visit to the stables with the announcement "that Miss Despard's mount 'Propriety,' had a very bad sore back, and could not be saddled again for some time."

This was a disappointment to her fair rider, as (it being an off-day with the hounds) a large riding party had been organised with a view to riding over to a neighbouring country mansion and having tea, and seeing the picture-gallery.

A ride of this kind was exactly what suited Miss Despard—no flying over fences, no galloping, but just a nice little orderly trot along the road, garbed in a perfectly cut habit, and mounted on a perfectly-mannered horse, with last, but not least, a pleasant cavalier to ride at her bridle rein.

Now, thanks to that abominable beast, all this amusement was knocked on the head.

"Have you nothing else that would carry me?" she asked with a plaintive expression, as she turned her light orbs on her host.

"Oh! well, I don't think there's another that you would care about riding. 'Fire King's' shies, 'Volcano' pulls a good bit."

"You can have my horse with pleasure, *Blanche*," said Helen; for I'm going down to see the schools this afternoon."

"Ah! I'm afraid he would be a little bit too much for Miss Despard," said the master of the house, dubiously. "He is young and wants to be ridden with a very light hand."

"Oh! as to that, I've a light hand too, Mr. Colville," said *Blanche*, reddening with anger.

"I've never seen him do anything wonderful with *Helen*—he seems quiet enough. I can ride every bit as well as she can, in my own style. You fancy I am no horsewoman because I don't hunt, but that is not the reason at all. I don't follow the hounds, nor go across country simply because I think it is only an amusement fit for men, and I don't approve of it for a woman."

"Oh! all right, Miss Despard. If your cousin gives up her mount, and you think you can manage him, I'm sure I shall be only too delighted to number you among our cavalry, and 'Scatterbrains' shall be brought round for you this afternoon. I only hope to goodness," he muttered to himself as he left the room, "that she won't give him a sore back too!"

(To be continued).

A RIVAL'S TREACHERY.

—302—

THE sudden appearance of Nelly Mathers, with the old Judge, her father, at our prospecter's cabin in the heart of the Sierra Madre was an unexpected flood of sunshine where all had been gloomy and austere.

Her two hours' tarrying was like the double-distilled quintessence of all the light, warmth and luxuriousness of a golden summer afternoon; and her sitting away was like a gradual and unnatural withering of everything that her sweet presence had seemed to call into freshness and beauty.

The fairest and loveliest girl in all New Mexico was Nelly, and there was an engagement between us. But it was subject to certain conditions, exacted by her father, which seemed to both of us hard and unnecessary, though we had agreed to abide by them to the letter.

"Don't be downhearted, dear," said Nelly, when we were alone together for the last time, before saying good-bye. "You are so brave and energetic that your miner's luck cannot but change before long; and, besides," placing her hand in mine, with her bright smile, "you are sure of my waiting."

We were standing among some rocks and mesquite bushes at the head of the mule-path that wound sinuously away down the side of the mountain.

A rod or two back of us was the cabin, where my partner, Seth Walters, and our hired man, Pedro, were awaiting Judge Mathers and his men in getting ready for a continuance of his journey home to Socorro, which had been interrupted by this little call upon us, at Nelly's entreaty, for she had accompanied her father on a week's visit to some paying silver-placers of his far away up among the Sangre de Christo Canyons, and they were anxious to get well along the plain below before nightfall.

But Nelly and I were so shut in just now by the mesquites that there was no likelihood of our being perceived by any of the men about the cabin, though we had them in plain view, so I not only retained the little reassuring hand she had placed in mine, but also took her in my arms and kissed her.

"Now that isn't fair, Nelly!" cried Nelly, freeing herself at once, but with no loss of her good humour. "You ought to be content to wait if I am!"

"Content! Yes, of course, since there's no help for it," I replied, a little ruefully. "But where are the four thousand pounds to come from which your father insists I must call my own before marrying you?"

"Out of the ground, to be sure. Where else?" said Nelly, laughing. "There, there, don't frown, dear! Do you think it costs me no pang to joke on such a subject? But neither of us is old, and your keen prospecting must result in something soon."

"I really hope so," I replied. "The interior of these ridges is just packed with silver ore somewhere, Nelly, if I only could chance upon an outcropping. However, I will bear up and hope on, if only for your sake. Seth knows of a ledge

over there in the Pine Buttes, which I am to prospect to-morrow, while he remains here with Pedro to make one more try for paying dirt in the gully back of the cabin there. Kiss me for a godspeed, and if there's the faintest glimmering of my striking it rich among the Buttes I'll make a break for Socorro with the good news, and let Seth wait for the same."

"I don't like your remaining any more with Seth Walters," said Nelly, in a troubled voice, after she had given me the kiss I-entreated.

"Oh, Seth is all right!" said I. "Since you gave him his quietus, and we can no longer be rivals, he has shown up squarely and manfully. He doesn't complain at all, says that your preference for me shall make no difference between us, and, barring an occasional moodiness, he's as kind and cheerful as ever."

"That is just it," said Nelly. "If he would complain more I wouldn't care. It isn't natural for him to be cheerful and contented under the circumstances."

I burst into a laugh.

"Now, don't misunderstand me, please," said Nelly, gravely. "You know that Seth could realize more than the stipulated four thousand pounds by selling out his mining stocks at Las Vegas, and that my father would have favoured this suit for my hand more than yours, save for my preference in--in the right direction."

And she gave me a tender look.

"I do know that," said I; "but what of it, since matters are as they stand? The Judge has given in; I have agreed to his conditions; I have your precious heart, my darling, and what more is there to do but to find a claim that will sell for four thousand pounds, provide you with the comfortable home that he insists on and receive your hand as my prize! Seth won't hinder me."

"I wish I was sure of it; but I don't like his looks since he compelled me to say frankly that I could never love him," said Nelly, slowly. "He seems to me a changed man. He has grown sinister and gloomy. Only an hour ago I surprised him while eyeing you furtively, with a peculiarly malevolent expression in his eyes and lips that haunts me still."

"I was quite sure that she was under a wholly false impression, and was about to argue with her to that end, when one of the men came running down from the cabin with word from the Judge that everything was in readiness for a start."

Twenty minutes later I stood alone on the same spot, watching the little cavalcade that was bearing my darling away from me winding off down the mountain in the glare of the afternoon sunshine.

Nelly had bravely kissed me before them all at parting, and the old Judge had spoken kindly and encouragingly while giving me his hand, but I felt sorrowful and distressed as I watched Nelly's little figure lessening slowly in the distance, until a sharp turn in the trail at the foot of the mountain carried the entire party out of sight.

"These partings and farewells kind of upset a chap sometimes, don't they, partner?" said a quiet voice at my elbow, but so unexpectedly that I turned with a violent start.

It was Seth Walters. We had been partners in prospecting for over a year, and with a uniform good understanding that even our rivalry for a pretty girl's love had apparently not interrupted in the least.

Seth was several years my senior, and before our coming together had saved and made a good deal of money, of which he was inordinately fond; but no one knew anything of his antecedents prior to his turning up in New Mexico, and he was not generally liked.

But though I had come to trust in him thoroughly I could not help just now recalling Nelly's suspicions concerning him with something of appropriateness to the place and occasion.

"Yes, old fellow, you are right," said I. "At all events, I generally lean towards greetings and welcomes as distinguished from partings and farewells."

"Ah! of course. But then you and Miss Mathers were alone a good bit down here just before the old Judge sent for her. You had plenty of

opportunity to say good-by, in your own way, I should say."

"Well, what of it?" said I, a little sharply.

"Oh, nothing, partner!" he went on, quietly. "Only I was going to bet that the young lady might have said something to you about me not altogether complimentary."

And he looked at me with a painful sort of eagerness.

He was a thick-set, powerfully-built man, with a rather ill-favoured face, and up to this time I had always found something mysterious but not disengaging in his very uncountenance. But now I noticed an odd, set look in his face which might have meant either jealous fury or consuming, suppressed bitterness over his own loveless lot, and in either case it excited my sympathy and pity.

I hesitated, and then frankly told him Nelly's suspicions, but at the same time saying that I had earnestly combated them, and should continue to do so.

"You are right there, mate," said Seth, with a resumption of his quiet, impenetrable manner, "and I am going to prove it to you."

"There's no need of that, Seth," I grumbled, discontentedly.

And then I began to inveigh against my poverty and the hardness of the conditions which had been imposed upon me as the price of Nelly's hand.

"Hold on, mate; you're off the track now," said Seth. "There's nothing mean about Judge Mathers, and it's only for his daughter's good that he has set you a hard task, as a thorough test of your grit and manliness, before intrusting her happiness irrevocably into your keeping. I said I would prove that Miss Mathers was wrong in her estimate of my character, and that you were right in defending me."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, mate: That if you fail in striking it rich over yonder in the Buttes—if you come back reporting as bad luck as we've had together all along—I'll—I'll lend you the four thousand pounds you require to qualify for your marriage."

His wholly unexpected offer—the immense magnanimity of it—fairly took my breath away.

"Do you mean it?" I gasped.

He seized both my hands, with a strange wildness in his look and manner.

"Yes, yes, I do mean it!" said he. "Only, of course, you'll first give the Buttes a fair trial, as was agreed! You'll go there to-morrow and dig and drill and blast first, to see what the rock-veins may yield you!"

"Oh, of course I will!" said I. "But hold on, Seth. I can't just yet realize your glorious offer, in case of my still failing to strike it rich there."

"Aha! But you accept, don't you? And you'll tell her some time how she has wronged me in her thoughts! Say you will, and say that you accept."

The sudden certainty of soon having Nelly as my own, came what might of my prospecting ventures, still almost overwhelmed me.

I fairly flung myself in his arms, notwithstanding a sort of suppressed exultation in his wildness that would otherwise have challenged my attention.

"I do accept, old boy!" I replied, lost in joyous emotions. "I do accept, and Nelly shall bless you as I do for your kindness, your nobleness, your generosity!"

He shrugged his shoulders, rapidly recovering his wonted stolid, rather aloof air, and as we walked back to the cabin he spoke no more of his offer, but occupied himself wholly with the details of my expedition on the following day.

Pedro, who was getting our supper ready, looked up quickly as we entered the cabin, and gave me a glance of peculiar significance—half of dread, half of warning, perhaps—which I was too excited to notice at the time.

He was an honest old fellow—a Navajo half-breed—who had been with me before my business association with Seth, and was wholly devoted to me.

I could not sleep that night until long after we had retired to our respective bunks. It was therefore nearly broad daylight when I turned

out, and Seth had my pack-mule almost in readiness for my expedition.

"All the tools, provisions, and blasting-powder you'll need are in the pack, leaving it still light enough for you to ride on top," said my partner, taking an extra inch in the belly-strap. "I do hope you'll strike it rich over in the Buttes."

"So do I; and I ought to have been off before this," said I, heartily. "But I can eat my breakfast in the saddle. Where's Pedro?"

"He's back in the washing, if you want to bid him good-bye," was the reply; and I at once went back over the ridge.

The old half-breed was sitting idly at the side of the washing, as if waiting for me.

To my astonishment, he at once rushed up to me, seized both my hands, and began earnestly to entreat me, in his Mexican *patois*, to forego the expedition, saying that he was quite sure my partner had been seized with insanity, or was meditating some treachery against me.

He talked volubly, and with little intelligibility, giving me the impression that he might be crazy himself; and I at last broke angrily away from him and returned to the cabin, saying nothing to Seth of what had occurred.

"What have you been burning?" I asked, climbing on top of the pack, and thanking Seth for some bread and meat that he handed up to me. "Smells as if a fuse had been just lighted."

Seth laughed.

"I just threw some fuse-scrap into the fire," said he. "Good-bye and good luck!"

We shook hands, and I started the mule along the trail we were to pursue—a dangerous and difficult one nearly all the way to the Buttes, forty odd miles distant. But my mule was powerful and willing, seeming to make nothing of his double load.

Once, on looking back, I saw Seth still standing at the cabin door, gazing after me with folded arms. On looking back once more, a little later, he was no longer there, and I pushed rapidly on, a dip in the ridge soon taking the cabin out of range.

But still later, when I had gone a mile or more, I was suddenly startled by a distant cry—a human cry, as of one in extreme terror or mortal agony—from the direction of the cabin.

I came to a halt, wondering what it could mean. But the cry was not repeated, and ascribing it after all to a California lion, a panther or some other wild animal, I pushed on without giving it another thought.

The sun rose gloriously, promising a perfect day. I had made a matter of eight or nine miles, and my mule was picking her way among a network of gullies, through a dangerous ravine that I had often traversed before, when I again became aware of the sulphurous smell I had noticed at the outset.

"What the deuce—" I muttered. "Can it be possible that one of the fuses in the pack has—"

I was interrupted by the pack itself beginning to smoke. I bounded to the ground and rushed crouching to the side of the ravine.

As I gained it, a sharp intonation caused me to look back. A comparatively slight explosion had ripped the sack, which was now on fire, and half tumbled the mule over into a deep gully.

"Was ever such luck!" I growled, and at the same time swearing a good deal, I am afraid. "There go my six pounds of blasting powder into useless smoke, and—"

Six pounds! More like sixty! For this time I was cut short by a second explosion, compared with which the first was no more than a fire cracker, and the force of which fairly flattened me up against the side of the ravine.

When I recovered, to find myself only somewhat stunned by the noise and concussion, the smoke of the explosion had cleared away; but down in the bottom of the gully lay what was left of the mule and the pack, for both had been literally blown to fragments.

Treachery! I should say so! Nelly's suspicions and Pedro's warnings had been equally and indubitably well-founded.

I breathed hard as I thought of the iniquitous trap which Seth had set for my destruction, to-

gether with his refinement of cruelty as exemplified in his apparently high-minded and magnanimous offer of helping me to a bride.

A thirst for vengeance possessed me, and instinctively I felt for my pistols. But they were not in my belt. I had laid them in the crutch of the pack just after starting, and they had disappeared, together with the mining tools and pretty much everything else.

An examination of the fragments of the pack in the gully convinced me that it had contained no provisions whatever—that, in fact, its contents had been made up almost wholly of powder; doubtless all there was on hand at the cabin—fully fifty pounds, I should say.

Suddenly, as I was about to clamber out of the gully, a spectacle met my gaze that transfixed me with astonishment and delight.

The explosion had displaced some rocks and opened a wide, deep fissure in the higher side of the gully that rambled up into the rocky wall of the ravine itself.

From the depths of this fissure there came a whitish, steely gleam, whose royal significance none could know better than I. I tore some specimens out of the cavity, and examined them expertly. It was no delusion. They were silver ore of a superb quality, and there were unmistakable indications of the outcropping, thus wonderfully revealed, extending deep and far in, it might be, an inexhaustible abundance.

I filled my pockets with some choice specimens, closed up the fissure, and was just getting out of the gully, when I heard the tramp of a horse coming down the trail.

I ran and concealed myself in a crevice on the opposite side of the ravine. Just then the horse and his rider came to a halt at the scene of the catastrophe.

The rider was Seth—Seth himself, mounted on the horse that we owned in common. It was well for him that I was unarmed. As it was, I could only grind my teeth in secret, as he looked gloatingly down into the blackened and blood-spattered gully, without taking the trouble to dismount and examine it closely, so fully must he have taken it for granted that the object of his murderous plot had been completely attained.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he exulted aloud. "Then it was just here that my unsuspecting partner, my accursed rival, was blown to fragments with the mule and the pack! Gad! but it was a noble plot. He doubtless didn't smell brimstone again till the half-dampened fuse, that I had so cunningly placed on top of the powder, sprang to its work like a tiger on its prey. Ho, ho, ho! What will my little Nelly say when I bring her the news! Tears and wallings at first, as a matter of course, and then—mine, mine for ever! Ho, ho, ho! And to think that I might have failed—that Pedro, the rascal, would have run after him with fresh warnings, had I not fixed his flint for him in time! Ho, ho, ho! What if that one death yell of that old marplot shall ring in my ears for ever! Do I not triumph still, with my rival dead, and my prayed-for prize of beauty in my grasp! Ho, ho, ho! Thorough's the word!"

This was the sum and substance of his fiendish soliloquy, though he rambled on at much greater length before putting spurs to his horse and hurrying away, his diabolical laughter echoing among the rocks long after he had disappeared from view.

Having no doubt from what I had overheard that he had murdered poor Pedro I set out at once to return to the cabin.

It was about noon when I reached it, or rather where it had stood, for it had been burned to the ground—and I found the charred remains of the poor old half-breed buried among the ruins.

A hunting-knife still sticking in the body, though with its wooden handle burned away, left no doubt of the manner of his death, nor of the cabin having been subsequently fired by the murderer.

I refreshed myself with a bath in a little spring that bubbled near at hand, and then set out on foot for Socorro, nearly fifty miles away, without any further delay.

I was so exhausted, however, that I had to interrupt my journey with some hours of repose,

and only reached Socorro at nine o'clock the next morning.

I proceeded at once to Judge Mather's residence, and chanced in upon him and his daughter just as they were being agonized over a most harrowing account of my accidental death from the lips of Seth Walters, who, though taking a more round-about route than I, had, doubtless, being mounted, preceded me there by several hours.

Nelly, who had been weeping bitterly, gave a shriek of delight as she saw me. The old Judge started up in dismay, and Seth, turning white, with his eyes starting out of his head, fled out of the house with an inarticulate cry, sprang on a horse that chanced to be standing just outside, and galloped away.

A few words of explanation from me were sufficient to start the alarm, and he obtained but a brief start of a dozen or more pursuers, who were speedily thundering in his wake.

When overtaken by his pursuers both he and his horse were found dead in the road, without a wound, the latter having been ridden to death, and his rider having perished, as well as could be made out, through sheer excess of excitement and fear.

He had been literally scared to death, which was perhaps less than he had deserved. But then there was no deciding what brief but appalling horrors or mortal terror and superstitious dread he might have undergone, for his head of thick hair, naturally jet black, without a silver strand, had turned as white as snow.

With Nelly at my side, her father facing me, and my ore specimens heaped on a table between us, you can be sure that it didn't take me long to tell my story.

That night the Judge accompanied me to my "find," and assisted me in staking it off.

Three days later he bought a third in interest of me for ten thousand pounds cash, and on the very day that he paid me the money Nelly became my wife.

We have been very happy and very fortunate ever since, for I was not long in assuring myself that I had "struck it rich" far more in obtaining Nelly herself than even in the great silver lode which the explosion had unearthed at "Silver Rift," as the place is now called.

LEILA VANE'S BURDEN.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JULIAN BERNADINE pushed himself free from his mother's arms, and fell back a pace till he rested against the closed door. The fireglow was the only light in the room, but it was sufficient to show the stern work that mingled in with the surprise written legibly on his lips and in his eyes.

"Explain yourself, mother," he said, his voice almost harsh and rough; "what in Heaven's name is the meaning of this! You know I am not fond of mysteries. Where is Leila, and what has happened!"

Mrs. Bernadine stood trembling in every limb. A sort of resentful fire burned fiercely beneath her excitement; resent against her son for repulsing her so roughly. She turned from him, and moved as well as she could towards the fireplace; her agitation took every natural impulse from her limbs, she felt as weak as though she had been ill for months.

"Your wife has left your house," she answered him, her voice cold but trembling; "she has gone to London, beyond that I know nothing—definite."

There was a significant pause before the last word came.

Julian approached the fireplace with a stride, an oath broke from his lips, he clasped his mother's wrist, and fixed his eyes upon her face. Mrs. Bernadine was terribly alarmed, his manner was something she had never seen before. She did not know him in this guise.

"If my wife has gone to London—left my house, as you put it so strangely—she has done so for some very good reason, of that I am as fully convinced as I am that I stand here. And as you have become acquainted with so much that seems disquieting to you, mother, I command you to tell me all that has happened here—since I left home three hours ago. Leila has gone to London, you say; why has she gone?"

Mrs. Bernadine's face took a mulish expression; that sort of hardness entered into her that is apt to come to exceedingly weak natures at times.

"Am I your wife's keeper, Julian?" she asked sullenly; she drew her hand from his hold, a burst of passion seized her. "I wish that I had died," she cried fiercely, "before she had ever come into our lives!"

Julian kept his eyes fixed upon the agitated woman.

"Ay, I see, I know now how you hate her!" he said bitterly. "I have deceived myself all these months in thinking, in hoping otherwise. You hate my wife, poor troubled child, and in your hate you not only are ready to believe ill of her, mother, you even wish her evil. I—I pray I may be wrong," the man said with a sudden break in his voice, and a sudden awful fear in his heart, "but it may be that your wish to do Leila some harm has been more than a wish."

"You are mad, Julian," Helen Bernadine exclaimed, her anger, her jealousy, her bitter disappointment at her son's manner overruling even her fear of his wrath. "I make allowance for the fact that you are distressed—but you go too far in your words. Recollect, I am a woman. If my claim on your respect as your mother is worthless to you," she paused, and then went on very swiftly before he could speak, "instead of accusing me of things which are as unjust as they are terrible, you should try and understand, if you can, what this afternoon's work has been to me. Your wife makes no confidant of me; yet I have not been able to shut my eyes to the fact that for some days past she has been acting, moving, speaking like a woman oppressed with a secret care. Your thoughts will go instantly as mine went to—to her father—and when I learnt this afternoon quite suddenly that Lady Bernadine had announced her intention of going up to town without waiting for your sanction, or escort, I immediately concluded that the cause of this strange departure could only be some summons from Mr. Vane. I beg to assure you, Julian, I should have done my best to urge your wife against such a journey, for though you say I hate her," with renewed bitterness, "still I am not inhuman enough to let her risk her health by such madness. She evaded me, however, and—"

Julian stretched out his hand to his mother.

"Forgive me for speaking harshly," he said; "you upset me so terribly for the moment. You cannot imagine what I suffered! Thank you for what you would have done, mother—may I ask you to do more? Let no one in the household gather that there was anything strange in my wife's journey to-day. I will follow her by this evening's express. It is some work of Vane's that has taken her. Her great delicacy has unfortunately laid her open to receive her father's cruelty only too surely. He has no doubt calculated on this, and has worked to a nicety upon her nervous condition. Had I been near her this would not have happened. Coward, scoundrel that he is!" Julian said, his voice broken with anger, "I ought to have been warned by his long silence. I should have been prepared for this. By Heaven! when I meet him it will go hard with him if I do not make him swear to leave Leila free from him in the future!"

He swung away from the fire, but Mrs. Bernadine called him back.

It would be quite impossible to describe the chaos of hot, miserable feelings that were clashing and thronging in the woman's mind at this moment.

She had not known the full depth and extent of Leila's power over Julian till now. Her own wild jealousy had reckoned upon some sign of

anger against the young wife, perhaps some expression of doubt mingled in with the anger. But Julian had no doubt, no anger for Leila. She had done foolishly, but she was the victim of another's wrong-doing, not a sinner herself; there was nothing but tenderness and anxiety in his mind for her.

Had there been one impulse of good stronger than her wretched hatred in Helen Bernadine's heart it might have risen to stand by the girl now at the last, even after she had spent so many hours in plotting and scheming to bring about what had actually happened, for treachery and definite wrong was not natural to her.

Her mental condition, however, had become so changed, so blighted by her unreasoning jealousy, by her hungry desire to win back her son's love to herself, no matter at what cost, she had drifted into a course of evil that could only terminate in a most terrible future for herself.

What instinct of good therefore might have come had Julian taken her news differently was awamped entirely in the flood of bitterest disappointment that swept over her, mingling in with all her other miserable sensations and making her for the moment a positive madwoman.

She called him back as he was moving away. "Stop!" she said, and the word escaped her as a husky note that sounded strange in her own ears. "Stop, where are you going? Julian."

Julian paused. "To follow Leila at once," he said, almost impatiently; the question struck him as being ridiculous.

"How can you follow her when you do not know where she has gone?"

Julian frowned; his face looked pale and worn in the firelight.

"She will have left some message for me—a note most probably; if not she is sure to have telegraphed to me on her arrival."

Mrs. Bernadine's heart gave a terrible leap. She bowed her head.

"Oh! my son," she said brokenly. "Your words, your faith go to my heart."

Julian stood so still he scarcely seemed a breathing man.

"Mother," he said, after what seemed a pause of a century, but was in reality only half a minute—"mother, dear, if you have any real love for me you will try to rid your mind of thoughts that are so unworthy of it. I will not stay to argue with you now on the injustice of your aversion to my poor child, who could not do any harm to you or anyone else; who is so infinitely good and noble, but I will ask you for the sake of the love that has always existed between us not to let these cruel suspicious thoughts, these unpardonable doubts, bring you down so low in my eyes as to destroy that tender respect, that faith I have always had in your womanliness and woman's goodness."

Mrs. Bernadine stretched out her hand to him. "I must speak," she cried wildly, "I must speak, even—even though you will tell me you hate me afterwards. All that you say would be so true, would be a shame to me, Julian, if I had only suspicion to go upon, but," unheeding the sound that broke from his lips, "but I am not speaking from suspicion only, I am speaking from facts."

"Facts!" the man repeated the word in a voice which thrilled with an amazement and an anger that was boundless. "Facts!" He came back a step or two. "Go on, mother," he said quietly, "let me hear these facts; of what do they consist? and what is the nature of the charge you are desirous of bringing against my wife?"

"My facts are two in number," Helen Bernadine answered him coolly; "first, the definite assurance that the summons that took Leila to London in this extraordinary way did not come from her father; secondly, the absolute proof that it was a man—wait, Julian, hear me out—and one whom Leila has reason to fear, who has had the power to draw her from her husband's home, and to make her travel at once to obey his summons," the woman broke off an instant. Julian's eyes disconcerted her, his intense calmness made her task so difficult.

"You will ask me for these proofs. I give them

to you. This afternoon as soon as Leila had gone her father arrived here unexpectedly; he did not remain more than a few minutes, but he remained long enough to let me see that for once his old nature had slipped from him, and that his object in coming here so unexpectedly was not to harm Leila or to ask her help but to warn her. The news that this enemy of hers was about to attack her roused for once the better feelings of the man, and he came to tell her of her danger and to stand by her side if needs be; but he came too late—for Leila was already gone."

Julian was silent another long moment as his mother paused; then he laughed a hard, bitter, most unhappy laugh.

"I suppose I ought to thank you, mother," he said, with a sarcasm that was like a blow to the excited overstrung and most wretched woman. "In order to prove your own truthfulness you have armed yourself with every sort of odious weapon with which you can strike a blow at my wife's integrity. You are clever; but you are not yet clever enough to cope with Eustace Vane. He played with you once before, remember, he can play with you again. Why?" Julian's voice was quivering with passion, "the very fact that he dared to come here this particular day is proof positive to me that his hand alone has worked the trick that has carried that poor child away from me. Your first proof, my dear mother, is worse than worthless; for the sake of your pretty little scheme against my dear wife's honour and honesty it is to be hoped your second one has more reliability in it than your first."

Mrs. Bernadine drew herself away from him. "I shall say no more, Julian," she said curtly; and a touch of the fear she had felt in the beginning ran expressed in the sullenness with which she spoke, in the sudden trembling of her hands. He barred her passage out of the room.

"Pardon me, mother," he said, with a coldness that was yet a burning fierceness. "You will say all. You cannot play with my holiest feelings in such a wanton manner and for nothing! You say you have a proof that Leila has gone to London not at her father's summons, but at the summons of some mysterious man who threatens a danger to her. How do you know this? and on what foundation do you dare to build up an accusation which is so shameful in every meaning? Speak at once. I do not ask, I command you to speak."

Mrs. Bernadine controlled her fear as well as she could, but the effort was tremendous. She seemed to be face to face with some fierce strange foe, a foe who would show no mercy, not with her own son, her big tender-hearted, gentle, generous son.

For the first time the full horror of her wicked work flashed into the woman's mind, she had a gasping sensation of terror upon her.

She had never slackened in her evil design upon Leila's happiness; she had calculated upon Julian's jealousy, and hot sense of personal pride and honour, to make the ruin of the girl's happiness complete and utter when the final blow should come.

To work an absolute separation between Julian and his wife, to put Leila as far out of her husband's care and love as though she had never come into his life at all—to smirch the young creature's most blameless soul with the stain of a sin, a wrong of which she would be incapable, to stand herself in the place Leila had held with Julian—to attain all this Helen Bernadine had let herself sink to a level so low that now, at the first realization of her own degradation, she winced and grew faint with horror; and the very suggestion of the awful havoc her treachery would work in her boy's heart made her wish with a wild despair that she were out of the world and at rest for ever.

Julian, seeing her stand before him white and trembling, calmed himself a little.

"Mother, I shall not ask you to forgive me for speaking roughly to you. When a man is struck an almost mortal blow courtesy has no place with him. I am sure," he repeated the words with passion, "that you imagine you are speaking this awful thing from conviction. Had you not told me that Eustace Vane was here this afternoon I would never have forgiven you for the

words you have dared to use against my wife. As it is I find it difficult to understand how you come to accept so easily any statement this man may bring to you. He is Leila's enemy, he is my enemy, he is a treacherous black-hearted hound, he has worked silently to bring some trouble upon us, and he has succeeded in one sense, though, thank Heaven! he will fail in the end. Say no more; if you desire to keep silence, mother, I am content that it should be so, for nothing you could say would shake my faith in Leila, and it might raise up a barrier in my love and faith in you which nothing, nothing," he repeated, "would ever break down!"

The woman shivered; all the hot flame of her jealousy rushed through her heart again; her shame, her terror at what she had done, vanished in that rush of burning jealousy.

Words came from her lips in a low fierce way; she struck him roughly; she tore Leila's sweet character to shreds—the pent up wrath against what her imagination had pictured first, and Eustace Vane's cunning had fostered afterwards, reached her son's ears as the voice of one speaking in a horrible nightmare.

"Trust—faith—love—for a girl who has schemed from the first to be your wife! Who dared to be your wife, to impose a false innocence and sweetness upon you when there was all the while so black a shadow in her life! Doubt me if you will, Julian, I have spoken out the truth, and you will prove, if you seek farther, how true my words are! You will find for yourself how worthy this girl is of your faith when you discover for yourself the miserable fact that this man, Henry Bartlett, has not only a claim upon Leila's past, but a power to draw her to him, even now—now when she is your wife—the mother of your coming child."

Julian never moved as his mother's voice died away into silence. When he spoke it was like the voice of a man ill unto death.

"You saw Leila before she went, mother!" he asked in that dull faint echo of his own cheery voice.

Mrs. Bernadine shook her head.

"No," she whispered.

"How did you first know she had gone?"

"Her maid told me; she accompanied Lady Bernadine to the station."

"And there is—no—no message—no word of any sort?"

Mrs. Bernadine shook her head again. "I questioned the maid—there is nothing, only that Lady Bernadine hopes to return to-morrow early. Murray wished to go with Lady Bernadine, but this was refused."

Julian still stood motionless, his lips moved stiffly as he spoke.

"And Mr. Vane arrived immediately afterwards, mother!"

"Immediately—he has followed Leila," Mrs. Bernadine added.

"Then," Julian's eyes had a flash in them, "then he knows where Leila has gone."

Mrs. Bernadine trembled.

"He—he can guess," she murmured. Julian's whole being relaxed again.

"Doubtless he can guess," he said, with unutterable contempt.

He turned round at this, and went out of the room. His mother standing looking into the fire, grew ashen white and cold as he went.

"Even now—he trusts her still—even now!" she said, between her teeth.

She had the consciousness of failure heavy upon her. She had played all her cards, and she had failed—worse than failed—for she had only worked to put herself farther away from Julian than she had ever been before, than she could have possibly dreamed of being.

He held her in contempt, she could feel the icy touch of that contempt closing over her heart. Long though she might live, she would never recover this moment, never be again to her boy what she had once been, his beautiful mother, beautiful in heart as in body! It was a horrible thought; and the game was not played out yet, though she had failed—there was another and a final trick to be played, and as this was in Eustace Vane's hands it was scarcely likely to go

very wrong. She had built on that fact a few hours ago; now she only dreaded it. She only remembered one thing—she had failed—she had worked to debase Leila, she had only debased herself. Even if the worst construction was forced into Julian's mind her hold was gone, he might live all his life with a riven heart, his mother would have no power to offer pity—for it would always, let come what might, remain that it had been her hands that had wrought the misery, her work that had ruined her boy's happiness, and torn away his faith as well as his love!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JULIAN went to work very quietly after leaving his mother. Beyond a hard, white look on his face he showed no signs of the shock he had received—and it had been a shock. He questioned his wife's maid, but obtained nothing more than Mrs. Bernadine had told him. The woman could give him no idea of Leila's movements in London.

He searched both his wife's room and his own for a scrap of paper on which she would have scribbled him a line. He found nothing, which was of course only natural considering that his mother's hands had been the first to garner to themselves the letter Leila had written in such haste and trouble, and which she had left on his dressing-table as being the most likely place to meet his eye when he returned from his long ride.

Then Sir Julian questioned the butler, who reiterated again and again the message Lady Bernadine had given him to the effect that she would telegraph on her arrival, and that she had left a letter for her husband explaining her hurried departure.

"Mrs. Bernadine were out, sir, at the time, and I took upon myself to urge her ladyship to wait till you come home, but she wouldn't listen, sir. She seemed in terrible trouble. I think, Sir Julian," the man said hurriedly, as if afraid of venturing the remark, "I think my lady must have had some bad news. I imagined at first it might have been something about Mr. Vane; but when he came, sir, this afternoon, I wondered if her ladyship could have had any bad news of Miss Sylvester!"

Julian's whole face brightened. The butler had been an old valued servant in the Bernadine family for years. Sir Julian had already endorsed the good opinion his predecessors at Wilton Crocible had expressed for the man; at this moment he felt as if he could have shaken Rochester's hand off in the relief and explanation that came at these last words.

"You have hit it exactly, Rochester," he said; and then once more he questioned the man about Leila's last message.

"You are quite sure her ladyship said she had left me a note?" he asked.

And Rochester could only repeat again and again what he had just said, that Lady Bernadine had impressed upon him not to forget that she had left a letter for her husband.

"She did not say where she had put the letter, Sir Julian; and she went off in such a bustle-like, that I should not be surprised if her ladyship carried the letter with her, instead of leaving it behind, as she imagined. You will go up by the seven forty-five, will you not, sir? I beg pardon, Sir Julian," Rochester added; "but would you like me to accompany you?"

Julian shook his head at this.

"Oh, no; there is no need for that. I shall go at once to Belgrave-square, Lady Bernadine is sure to be there," he spoke almost with conviction, so comforting had been the suggestion that Rochester had given him.

He busied himself in getting something to eat and in preparing for his departure. He ordered Leila's maid to get ready also; he trembled a little at the thought that harm could come to his darling through this wild escapade.

"I must scold her very tenderly," he said to himself, unable to subdue his anxiety as thoughts followed on thoughts. "She has evidently been much alarmed about Margot, unless my first

theory is correct, and that hound has tricked her into believing some trouble about him! Anyhow, she is in no condition to take such a journey. I shall not breathe easily till I hold her in my arms again."

Time went quickly, and in another half hour Julian was being driven to the station with the maid beside him carrying Leila's dressing-bag and a few other things that the young husband thought would be for the girl's comfort, since she could not return to her home for several hours at the very least.

"And in fact, if I find her much fatigued, I shall keep her in town a day or two," Julian said to himself.

He had waited till the last moment for a telegram to arrive, but none had come when he had finally left. Rochester had orders to telegraph on any message that might come to the various stations at which the express train stopped on its journey to London.

Julian had come away without a word to, or about, his mother.

He tried, in fact, not to think about her; the mood that her terrible words, her cruel attitude had brought upon him was something too sad and for him to realise all at once. That would be for afterwards. His only definite feeling was a yearning to see Leila's lovely face once again, and to hold her to his heart, to shield her from the rough, the terrible words that his mother's anger and jealousy had poured out against her.

He was tired and ill during the long journey. At each station there were eager questionings, but no message was waiting for Sir Julian, therefore no telegram could have reached Wilton Crocible.

It was only when he stood finally in the bustle of the big London terminus, and realised that it was the world of the great city that teemed and surged about him, that the first deathly touch of fear came to Julian, for though he was in London at last how was he to know where to find Leila!

A thousand hideous thoughts and possibilities flashed through his brain as he sat with his heart cold in his breast, being driven through the night streets to Belgrave-square.

What if Rochester's suggestion were to fail? What if some part of his mother's mad accusation should be true? What if his own first theory of treachery were also to be true? And now as he sat here, being whirled through the streets of London, Leila had been lured to some other spot miles and miles away. It was all awful to bear!

Julian was proving at such a moment what so many, many a creature has to prove in this world, that the realisation of any trouble no matter how great, is better than the suffocating agony, the dread of suspense of the unknown!

The first aspect of Mrs. Sylvester's house told him to be prepared for disappointment, it was all dark and closed. He had to ring several times at the hall bell before the big door was opened to him.

The woman who stood before him was not one of the regular servants, but she was very civil, and answered all his questions willingly.

Lady Bernadine had not been to the house, no one had been to the house; Mrs. Sylvester and Miss Madeline would not be back for some time; but the last news was that Mrs. Sylvester was much better—in fact, going on very nicely. If there was any message it would be sent on to Mrs. Sylvester at once.

Julian thanked the sleepy woman, and turned down the steps.

His face was white, haggard, and old as he stood by the cab again.

"Her ladyship has not been here, Weston," he said, and he could not still the tremble in his voice, nor shut out the anguish from the eyes of the maid, whose trouble was only equalled by her sympathy.

"I've been thinking, sir," Weston said, eagerly, "as we ought to have made some inquiries at Euston when we arrived. There was the guard as travelled up with her ladyship, sir. I made so bold as to ask him to do all he could for her when she got to London, when I found she would not take me with her; perhaps—"

But with Julian it was more than "perhaps."

In an instant they were rattling back to the station, the man driving for all he was worth at the vision of such a splendid fare as this promised to be.

"What a fool I was not to have thought of this," Julian said.

He was very kind to the maid, and brought tears to her eyes by his consideration for her.

"You must have something to eat, Weston," he said, "when we get to the station again. I brought you away in such a hurry, I am sure you must be hungry, and tired too."

"Oh! I couldn't eat, sir, till I know just where and how her ladyship is. It is getting very late, sir," Weston added with a little catching sigh, as they passed a big clock that pointed to twenty minutes past ten.

Julian winced as he looked at the time.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried in his soul, "let me end this suspense! Another hour of this uncertainty will drive me mad!"

Something died in the heart of Julian Bernadine in this moment of anguish—the joy and the brightness of his spirit that, despite all his shadowed youth had lived on unbroken with him, giving him hope when hope had seemed so far away, and bursting into a sort of new boyishness when love and happiness had come to him. He would never be the same again.

Weston's heart was full of grief for her master as she watched him rushing about the big station trying to find the officials who could, perhaps, give him information.

She had been placed on a bench with the bag and other things beside her, and her mind revolved over and over again all that had happened.

"There's something in it all as I can't understand. Her poor ladyship! shall I ever forget her white face, and her big startled eyes when she told me she must go to London at once. Oh, yes, there's something very wrong, and I hope I may be forgiven, but I can't help thinking as Mrs. Bernadine might have prevented all this if she'd have cared to do so. She ain't never deceived me, she fair hates my lady, poor little thing. I wish to goodness they'd never come to live together, that I do. It don't never answer, more special like when the mothers as young like as Sir Julian's mother. Oh, I wish Miss Sylvester had been in London to-night, what a comfort she would have been."

It was a difficult task evidently for Sir Julian to find the information he required. Weston sat and watched eagerly for his coming.

The hands of the big clock moved on slowly but surely; it was now close upon eleven o'clock, and Weston's heart gave a new throb of fear for her lady.

"Oh! where can she be! she that delicate she can hardly stand or walk. Oh! what dreadful calamity can have happened to her? Oh! good Heaven have her in your care!"

The prayer had scarcely fluttered on the maid's lips when a man approached her. It was the guard of the train by which Sir Julian and she had just travelled.

"You're with Sir Julian Bernadine, I think, aren't you miss?" he asked, respectfully.

Weston gave a little scream as she saw a buff-coloured envelope in his hand.

"Oh! you've got a telegram for my master. At last we shall have some news. Oh! sir, will you be so good as to go and tell Sir Julian? I mustn't leave these things. There, that's him, that fine tall gentleman talking over there, please go at once."

Weston sat with a beating heart watching the man go across to where Julian was standing.

She almost gave a little cry as she saw the eager way he tore open the telegram, and then she was on her feet, for Julian was hastening across to her.

"Our search is ended, Weston," Julian said, his voice husky with reactionary pain and the new pain the message had just given him; "her ladyship is safe but she is very ill. This telegram has just been re-telegraphed by Rochester. Oh! thank Heaven we had the sense to come back to the station!"

Weston was conveyed to another cab, and Julian, having dispensed much golden largesse among the railway officials who had vied with one



"OUR SEARCH IS ENDED, WESTON," JULIAN SAID, HIS VOICE HUSKY WITH REACTIONARY PAIN.

another in their desire to help him, got in beside her once again, and directed the driver to get to Mountroyal-street without the smallest delay.

He felt very weak and ill as they were being whirled there.

So many acute moments of suffering had robbed him of courage and of strength. The fact that he was going to be with Leila immediately was not so clear before him as the agony that he would have had to endure if this telegram had not reached him.

He was not in the mood to wonder or to sort the reason for Leila's journey to her old lodgings. Only one fact was clear, that the hand of Eustace Vane would be proved on investigation to have been the means of bringing the girl away from her home, and from the shelter of a care which was so necessary to her.

The message Rochester had telegraphed on had reached Wilton Crosbie evidently about an hour after he had left.

It was directed to himself, signed "Newton," and ran—

"Please come at once. Lady Bernadine is here and very ill. Thirty-nine, Mountroyal-street."

Julian knew, of course, all the story of Mrs. Newton's kindness to Leila in the old days, and of her pride and delight in the girl's good fortune.

He had never met the woman, but the first great sensation of relief that came to him was the thought that his wife was in the care of a friend, though humble. After this nothing was remembered save those ominous words—"she is very ill."

The weight of fear, the cold, sick feeling that came into Julian Bernadine's heart as he was driven through dingy streets to the one particular dingy street and house where his darling lay deepened terribly each moment.

He alone, perhaps, out of all the world, knew how weak Leila's physical stamina was.

He had been watching each day, each hour almost, with an eager and an anxious eye, fearing the rough wind to blow upon her, and now she had been torn from this care and she lay "very ill,"

His white lips whispered the words again and again, and when at last the cab stopped before the door and he got out on to the pavement, he reeled in his agitation and fear like a drunken man.

Mrs. Newton had evidently caught the sound of the wheels for she opened the door before they could ring.

"Oh, sir, you have come! Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! I doubted if the telegram could reach you in time to bring you to-night. Tread softly, sir, and come this way. The doctor is here still; he has been here all the night, pretty near!"

With her strong arm Mrs. Newton almost supported, rather than guided, Julian into the front parlour. Her eyes, not her ears, caught the inaudible whisper on his lips.

"You must please be so good as to wait, Sir Julian," she answered him, gently. "I daren't let you go up just now; there's a nurse there, and I sent for the best doctor I could think of; and now," Mrs. Newton added, briskly, "now I am going to give you a drop of brandy, sir, before I tell you another word."

She stood over the young man and literally forced the stimulant down his throat; giving a dose to Weston at the same time.

"Now, I'll tell you all I have to tell, sir," she went on, "which ain't much; only that this evening late, about six thirty to seven o'clock, a cab drove up and her ladyship got out. I see, then, she were ill and very much upset, but I were just too glad to see her to scold her for coming. I brought her in here, sir, and then she went off into a faint. I lay her down, sir, for a quarter of an hour, and then she comes too again, and she whispers to me, as she were in great trouble,—

"I've come here to meet a gentleman on business," she said to me, sir. I told her as no gentleman had come; and then she sighed, and tears come in her eyes.

"Ah! but he'd come," she whispered; 'for he never breaks his word.' And, sure enough,

at that moment the bell rung, and I heard some one asking for Lady Bernadine.

"As soon as Miss L.—, her ladyship, I did ought ter say, heard his voice, she give a gasping sigh, and then, sir, she slipped down again in another faint, much worse than the first. I called to my servant and sent her for the doctor, and then I spoke to the gentleman—Mr. Bartlett, he called himself, sir—and I told him her ladyship was in no condition to see him; 'and if,' I made so bold as to add, Sir Julian, 'you've got any kind of real business to talk over with Lady Bernadine, perhaps you'll be so good as to wait till her husband comes this evening!'

"At that, sir, he give a sort of curse as he slunk away, and I knew him then, sir, a seedy sort of man as has been here many times a inquiring after her ladyship. Someone as wants to worry about her father, that's what he is, sir. And now I'll leave you and go and see what the latest news is. I'll be back in a moment!"

Julian sat motionless on the hard horsehair sofa. He was alone, Weston had gone into the kitchen. The hot influence of the brandy crept through his veins, giving him heat and strength; but hotter than this—fierce, cruel almost, ran a hideous, an awful doubt, born of his mother's words, and carrying a devastating passion and grief too great to be measured by any words to the heart of one who was not only a man who loved jealously, but who was a husband with a husband's jealousy of his honour as well as of his love.

(To be continued.)

THERE is in Spain a river called Tinto, which has very extraordinary qualities; its waters, which are as yellow as a topaz, harden the sand and petrify it in a most surprising manner. If a stone falls into the river and rests upon another, they both become perfectly united in a year. It withers the plants on its banks, as well as the roots of trees, which it dyes the same hue as its waters. No fish live in its stream.



BASIL WAS EAGERLY WATCHING CECIL WHO SEEMED TO BE HEEDLESS OF THE DANGER SHE WAS IN.

A MAIDEN FAIR.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A COLD evening in very early spring. All day a bleak wind had howled up and down the busy London streets, and whistled shrilly in the deserted suburbs. Ladies who merely had to cross the pavement to their luxurious broughams pulled their costly furs more closely round them, and delicately shivered, while their poorer sisters, who had no warm clothing to protect them, drew their tawdry rags together, their teeth chattering with cold and hunger, and slipped silently round corners, crouching as near the wall as possible, here and there, for a moment's protection from the stormy blasts, until the aroma of rich food, arising from the area kitchens sent them shuddering away.

In front of a large house facing the park a carriage had been in waiting some time, the coachman occasionally walking his horses up and down, then keeping them stationary again before the door.

A tall, dark, handsome man had been passing to and fro opposite these houses almost as long as the carriage. He was evidently waiting for someone, for now and again he drew his watch from his pocket, scrutinised it in the light of the nearest lamp, uttered an impatient exclamation and walked on.

Just as he passed the waiting carriage once more the door of the house was opened, and a broad stream of light flashed across the pathway, illuminating the bright bays and the glittering harness.

Basil Courtenay glanced idly into the hall as he muntered past.

Instantly the careless, insouciant expression disappeared from his handsome face, and was succeeded by a look of intense admiration and

interest; such a look as seldom fails to make its appearance on a man's countenance at sight of a beautiful woman; unless, indeed, he be a confirmed misogynist. Basil Courtenay was anything but that, though by no means unduly susceptible, and he only just succeeded in stifling an unguarded exclamation of delight. For inside that entrance hall, only two or three yards from the open door, stood the most beautiful girl that Basil had ever seen in his life.

He had travelled in many lands, and gazed at many lovely women, but none of them, in his estimation, could equal this fair English girl, as she stood for a moment in the brilliant light, near the open door of a sitting room, speaking to someone inside.

A sea-green robe floated round her, sprays of seaweed catching it up here and there; strings of pearls ornamented her white neck and arms, and from beneath a fillet of seaweed and seed pearls her golden hair streamed in wavy masses to her slender waist.

"Undine!" said Basil to himself, stirred out of his ordinary calm and coolness by this bewitching vision.

He crossed quickly to the other side of the road, then turned for another cautious look. Just then a maid came forward with a heavy fur cloak, and covered up the dazzling picture.

The lovely girl descended the steps, entered the brougham, and was driven swiftly away. The house door closed, shutting in all the warmth and brightness. And Basil Courtenay was left outside in the dark, his eyes feeling strained and glazed, the image of that fair enchantress imprinted on his heart for ever.

Who was she? he wondered. If only he might contrive to discover her name! He had many friends in town, some of them might know her.

Basil recrossed the road and ran lightly up the steps. Quickly striking a match he inspected the door, found the number, drew out his pocket-book, and was about to make a brief entry, when a sudden gust of wind blew out the feeble light.

Basil hastily struck another match, dotted

down the number, and was turning away, when he found himself confronted by a burly policeman, who flashed a bull's-eye lantern upon him, and sternly demanded what he was doing there. In the dim light the police officer had only seen a tall man who seemed to be inspecting locks and fastenings in a remarkably suspicious manner, probably with the intention of effecting a burglarious entrance later on.

A second look in the bright light of his lantern convinced him of his mistake; unless, indeed, the man before him happened to be a member of "the swell mob," but the officer surmised, and correctly enough, that a thorough gentleman stood before him.

The aristocratic face, with its clear-cut features, its keen dark eyes, drooping brown moustache, the strong white hands, on one of which gleamed a massive signet ring, the well-cut heavy overcoat, with its fur collar, all this did not look much like a "midnight marauder"; and the deep rich voice completely reassured him.

"All right, my man!" said Basil, with an easy laugh, "I am not up to any burglarious proceedings. I merely wished to obtain the number of this house."

The policeman's eyes twinkled. He too had seen that beautiful young lady, and he had a very good idea why this handsome man was so anxious to obtain a little satisfactory information.

"Do you know who lives here?" asked Basil, fumbling in his vest pocket.

"Mrs. Vigan, a widow lady, sir," replied the man instantly. "She has no family, but a young lady is staying with her. I don't know her name. She came out a while ago."

"Yes, I saw her," said Basil, briefly. Then, dropping a silver coin into the officer's ready hand, he turned away. He had not gone far, however, when he met the man for whom he had been waiting, his great friend, Dane Vereker, who was about his own height, and much the same build, but fair instead of dark, with merry blue eyes, full of fun and frolic.

"What on earth have you been doing?" ex-

claimed Basil, irritably. "I have been waiting here for hours, kicking my heels on that pathway."

"Very sorry, dear boy, but I really could not get away," returned Vereker, equably; "you know what Eleanor is when she is determined to keep a fellow dancing attendance upon her."

"I had to remember an imaginary telegram, which must be sent off at all costs, before I could get away."

"If I had told her I was off to meet you she would have given me no peace till I promised to take you back with me."

"No, probably not," said Basil, with an impatient laugh. "I suppose I ought to feel honoured by her preference, but I fear I most certainly do not appreciate it."

There was no conceit about this.

Eleanor Barnes had made no secret of her infatuation for this handsome man; and it was a standing joke among her acquaintances at the present time. She was now on a visit to Mrs. Vereker, Dane's stately dignified mother, and though that lady was much annoyed at her conduct, she could not well shorten her guest's visit, Eleanor's mother being one of her most intimate friends, and a lady whom she esteemed as highly as she disliked her daughter, who was so very unlike her.

Miss Barnes was on the look-out for a wealthy husband, and had tried her utmost to entrap Basil Courtenay; but she was not the only one of her type whom that young man had encountered, and he took refuge in distant politeness when compelled to meet her at his friend's house.

Usually, however, he managed to see Dane outside somewhere, and had arranged to meet him on this particular evening, little thinking how long he would have to wait, and little caring, now that he had been rewarded by that bright vision.

"The loveliest girl I ever saw in my life, Dane, my boy," he said, enthusiastically, after giving his friend an account of all he had seen.

"I must find out who she is. I shall not rest until I have obtained an introduction. She is staying with Mrs. Vivian."

Dane Vereker started, and then laughed heartily.

"What a lark!" he said, disrespectfully. "Ah, Basil, see what you missed by that refusal to accompany me this afternoon. I had—afternoon—tea—at—Mrs. Vivian's house."

He drew out the significant words, with a deliberate pause between each one, and roared with laughter again as he caught sight of Basil's chagrined face in the light of a lamp they were gazing.

"What is her name?" asked Basil eagerly.

"Mrs. Vivian's name?" replied his friend, mischievously, "oh, it is Georgiana, I believe. I think she signed herself 'Georgiana Vivian,' when honouring me with a note of invitation not long since."

Basil longed to shake him.

"No; I mean the younger lady, her visitor, of course," he said, restraining himself by an effort.

"The younger one; let me see," began Dane slowly; "her name is—"

At this moment a sharp gust of wind swept round the corner, and took away with it Dane's hat, whirling it along the street in front of him. Off he dashed in pursuit, Basil following slowly, his thoughts still occupied with the fair unknown.

By the time Dane had recovered his hat, and finished grumbling at the undignified chase, the two men were opposite one of the West-end clubs, on the steps of which stood several men they knew.

Dane Vereker immediately went up to them, while Basil, suddenly recollecting an engagement which until now had been completely driven out of his mind, hurried onwards.

It was very tiresome, but he would see Dane next day, and make him tell him all he knew.

Here, however, Fate, inexorable Fate, stepped in. When Dane Vereker reached his room that night a telegram awaited him, informing him of his father's serious illness, and in less than an hour he was on his way to Devonshire, the occur-

rences of the evening forgotten in his overwhelming anxiety.

Fortunately all danger was over by the time he arrived, and his father rapidly recovering.

CHAPTER II.

At exactly the same hour on the following evening Basil Courtenay might have been seen pacing up and down in front of the house which, as he supposed, contained his enchantress.

Lights gleamed from all the windows, carriage after carriage drew up in front of the door, and deposited the gaily-dressed occupants.

Evidently a ball or dance was in progress, and as one happy man after another passed into the house Basil fairly ground his teeth with rage.

To think that all those men would have the privilege of dancing with that lovely girl while he himself must remain outside.

It was too much for Basil, and he turned away walking briskly, careless whither he went.

Presently he found himself on the banks of the Serpentine, looking down into the glittering water.

Then, for the second time, he was regarded with much attention by a member of the force, as a helmeted constable walked up and down behind him with heavy tread, evidently under the impression that this dejected-looking man was meditating suicide.

With a short hard laugh, which confirmed the constable in his belief that the gentleman had "something on his mind," Basil turned away, and walked sharply along the road again, quite away from the water, which, however, he had scarcely seen, so completely was his gaze turned inwards.

He was longing now to know the name of the girl he had seen.

He did not think he would have much difficulty in ascertaining that much. Mrs. Vivian was so well known, anyone staying with her would be well-known too.

Afternoon tea was Basil's abomination. He enjoyed a cup of strong tea or good coffee immensely, after his late dinner, but the afternoon brew, with the scandal which so often accompanies it, the inevitable gossip, all this was not to his taste at all.

However, for the next few days he attended several afternoon teas, and one afternoon he heard "Mrs. Vivian" announced.

"At last," he thought contentedly; but Mrs. Vivian entered alone, to Basil's disappointment.

Having convinced himself by a few cautious inquiries that this was really the "Mrs. Vivian" outside whose house he had spent those unenviable moments, Basil begged an introduction from the hostess.

This was willingly accorded, and presently an easy flow of conversation was passing between Mrs. Vivian and Basil, the lady becoming much interested in him as soon as she discovered that she had been at the same school as his mother years ago.

Basil wondered if Mrs. Vivian would mention the young lady he had seen, and tried to lead up to it in a wily manner.

"I must tell my mother whom I have had the pleasure of meeting, when next I see her," he said, pleasantly. "Where shall I tell her you are now residing?"

"In Greville-gardens, number four," replied Mrs. Vivian. "I am alone now, except for my companion, a middle-aged lady, who manages the house for me. I have had a young friend staying with me, but she—"

Here Mrs. Vivian was interrupted by the approach of a lady, with several daughters, and Basil was compelled to stand aside, his curiosity unsatisfied.

When the other ladies passed on Basil again turned to Mrs. Vivian, driven to bay, and looking very handsome and determined.

"Mrs. Vivian, will you kindly tell me the name of that young lady who has been visiting you? I have a special reason for asking this. I cannot tell you now, and here," with a look round the crowded room, "but a great deal depends upon it, to myself at least. I have seen her."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Vivian, suddenly enlightened, there was such intense meaning in those last words. "Her name is Cecil Grantley," she said, hurriedly, "and she is quite the sweetest girl I know, a great favourite of mine."

Basil was not at all surprised to hear that.

"Cecil lives at Beech Court, Devonshire," continued Mrs. Vivian; "her mother is living, but her father died some years ago. Well, I really must run away now. Come and see me to-morrow, Mr. Courtenay, I want to hear all about yourself and your mother."

Basil faithfully promised to call. Little fear that he would break that promise. Promises were sacred things with Basil Courtenay, to be kept at all costs, no matter what self-sacrifice might be involved.

He would have little difficulty in keeping this one, which promised pleasure, for though that fair girl was no longer with Mrs. Vivian, he and his new friend could talk about her, and Basil quite looked forward to this treat, though his anticipations were somewhat damped by the conviction that something would happen to prevent him calling, or that if he called, Mrs. Vivian would be unable to see him.

If she could see him they would be interrupted by other callers, and he would find an avalanche of society small talk descending upon his devoted head, while the one topic which interested him, which indeed was fast becoming the only one he cared to discuss, would be passed over altogether.

Basil met several of his friends during the evening, but resisted all their efforts to draw him into various resorts of amusement, and sat alone smoking, until late that night, trying to contrive a plan for innocently presenting himself in the neighbourhood of Beech Court, Devonshire.

This was no passing fancy, Basil knew, such as many a man indulges in, for a short time, after seeing a bewitching girl, to whom he is unable to speak, and about whom, simply because of the difficulty in becoming acquainted with her he feels incessantly curious.

If he never met Miss Grantley again he knew that he should never forget her. That however many beautiful girls he saw in the future he would always be mentally contrasting them with that bright vision he had accidentally seen.

The shadow would be more valuable to him than the substance.

Always, until he saw Cecil Grantley again, there would be that wretched sense of loss, of failing to be satisfied with life, as this happy young man had always found it so easy to be before that eventful evening. He was tempted at times to wish that he had never lingered near Greville-gardens on that night, tempted even to wish that he had never known, or waited that night for, Dane Vereker.

For this overpowering element, this all-conquering love, will speedily outweigh the strongest, and, until its advent, the most faithful of masculine friendships.

CHAPTER III.

On the following day Basil Courtenay positively found himself crossing the threshold of the house outside which he had spent so many anxious minutes.

He tried to imagine how he would have felt at this moment if that house had still contained the fair face and form he so longed to see again.

His heart would have been beating more quickly, he knew, however cool and collected he might have appeared; but he was now about to see a well-preserved, if somewhat elderly lady, not a bewitchingly beautiful young one, who had fairly or unfairly stolen that heart, and he felt calm and conventional enough.

Mrs. Vivian had received visits from several of her friends that day, but they had all passed on to other houses, and Basil was very pleased to find her alone. They had a cosy hour or so to themselves over the delicious tea and cakes on the "afternoon tea" table.

Mrs. Vivian entertained the young man with some short and amusing accounts of his mother's youthful pranks at the school they had both

attended as "boarders;" and Basil stored them up in his memory for future use, resolving to electrify his handsome mother by the sudden mention of some of her childish frivolities.

A beautiful cabinet photograph of Cecil Grantley stood on one of the side tables, and Basil looked at it with longing eyes.

"Mrs. Vivian," he said, suddenly, withdrawing his eyes with an effort from that bewitching pictured face, "I told you that I had a very good reason for wishing to know the name of that young lady, and that I had seen her. My chief aim in life will now be to win her for my wife."

Mrs. Vivian looked at him in amazement.

"Well, really, I have often heard it said that this is a rapid age," she remarked, seriously; "but I do not think that I ever before so fully realised the fact. My dear boy, you have only seen Cecil at a distance, you have never spoken to her, you know absolutely nothing about her character and disposition, her education, her tastes, and yet you feel yourself justified in making such an astounding assertion. Oh, the folly of youth!"

Still she smiled very kindly and encouragingly at him, and Basil saw that the folly found favour in her eyes. Cecil was already a prime favourite with her.

Basil was on the way to her heart of hearts. Never had she met with a young man who so impressed her; at all events not since the late Mr. Vivian was a young man, and that was many years ago.

There was something about Basil which rather reminded the good lady of her own young lover in those long ago days of courtship, when Lawrence Vivian had walked and ridden miles to meet her for a few short moments; when the sound of her stern parent's voice in the distance would send the lovers flying different ways to escape him, until at last a providential accident, which enabled Lawrence to assist his future father-in-law most materially, turned the scale in the favour of the almost hopeless young couple, and waited them into the safe haven of matrimony.

Mrs. Vivian had not yet forgotten how her lover's face would light up at the mere sight of her, and now she saw and understood the same light in Basil's dark eyes, as they rested on that fair pictured face before him.

"They were made for each other," thought the lady, sympathetically, "and as a rule it is invariably those who are by nature most fitted to be joined together who are the most ruthlessly severed and parted by some cruel Fate. Intense happiness seems just within their grasp, when Fate steps in, and intense misery is henceforth their lot. A wave of Fate's wand, and all is changed. The roseate hues of hope die away, and instead of them come the dull dark grey tints of despair. That is, if one allows oneself to become despairing. The best way is to set to work to try to conquer Fate; but this needs more courage than the majority of hopeless ones are gifted with. Dear me! here am I, indulging in metaphysics; and I promised to call for Mrs. Percival, and accompany her to see those Court costumes."

And having successfully extricated herself from the regions of romance Mrs. Vivian betook herself to her dressing-room, and rang for her maid.

Meanwhile, down in Devonshire, Cecil Grantley was going through sundry of those experiences which almost invariably attend a young and fascinating girl, no matter where she may happen to be.

The vicar of the church she attended complained that he could seldom retain a curate for any length of time, as one hapless young man after another fell a victim to Cecil's unconscious powers of attraction; and being quite unable to remain in her vicinity after the quiet refusal they were compelled to listen to departed from the neighbourhood, and sought work in less congenial, though perhaps less harassing atmospheres, some allowing the sorrow and disappointment to work beneficially upon their characters, moulding them into a more perfect form, others deteriorating and becoming careless, according to their relative strength of mind.

The vicar at last met with an elderly man, and

congratulated himself on the improbability of this stern, grave-looking individual being attracted by the bright young girl; but, as he pathetically remarked later on the middle-aged helper was worse than all the others put together, and when it came to the hapless man arriving at such a state of confusion that he positively handed his vicar a copy of amatory verses, in mistake for a paper of parish accounts, that astounded gentleman regarded him so severely over his spectacles, and gave him such a scathing lecture, that at last, in sheer despair, the unhappy man resigned, taking himself and his woes elsewhere, so soon as the vicar had obtained a substitute.

Warned by experience, that sternest of all mentors, the vicar reluctantly decided upon having a married curate to succeed him, and things went on more smoothly.

Cecil had not the very faintest idea of the fact that a singularly handsome man was wildly in love with her at the present time.

She had not even seen Basil Courtenay, as he stood there, gazing so admiringly upon her.

Occasionally she pictured to herself, as girls will, the sort of man she might marry later on, if ever she should marry, and a brief glance at the mirror at this period of her meditations, proved that the young lady imagined herself to have at least a chance, as indeed she might well decide, without the slightest vanity, after all her late experiences in town.

When she meditated thus, a form very similar to Basil Courtenay's would come before her mental vision, and she would endow the phantom with many sterling good qualities, and much deep feeling.

Cecil had met many handsome men, handsomer perhaps than Basil, but they all seemed to her to lack the mental strength and power which she so much admired in a man.

Not that Cecil by any means despised bodily prowess. She liked to watch the movements of an athlete.

A good oarsman, a skilful cricketer, football, or polo-player, all these found favour in Cecil's eyes; but this was not enough for her.

A man who "never read" always found himself politely passed over by Cecil Grantley however handsome he might be, while she held lengthy conversations with some "Student fellow," as the disappointed one would observe, caressing his moustache with an air of vexation, and gazing savagely at the place where Cecil sat, listening enthralled to the interesting accounts given her by the literary man, and thinking ruefully how quickly she had turned away from himself and his stupid remarks, his idle compliments, and absurd speeches.

Basil Courtenay was feeling in much better spirits now. He knew the name of that lovely girl. He knew where she lived. He knew almost all about her that Mrs. Vivian could tell him, in fact, and now it only remained for him to contrive to obtain an introduction to her somehow. He fully intended to follow Miss Grantley into Devonshire, but he was quite sure that this bold plan would require very careful elaboration to be at all successful.

He must not begin by startling the girl. He had seen at a glance that Cecil was not the sort to be attracted by any passing stranger, or to give herself lightly to any man. She would have to be wooed and won, and waited for. Basil felt sure of that, and in his own mind he honoured her all the more for this fact. The young man was quite aware how hard it would be for him to refrain from telling her of his love as soon as he found himself on speaking terms with her (oh! blissful thought!), but he was so fully convinced of the utter folly and uselessness of such a proceeding.

He could almost imagine the cold stare of surprise with which his announcement would be greeted, the icy manner in which Miss Grantley would refuse to listen to him, for Mrs. Vivian had related several little episodes to him, lightly sketched, but perfectly true accounts of the way in which sundry promising men, whose names the discreet lady did not mention, had "come to grief" through taking too much for granted, thinking they might pursue their usual tactics,

carry on matters in their ordinary all-conquering style, and had promptly been called to order, and taught better manners by the surprised beauty, who although astounded at their presumption, had all her wits about her, and very speedily scattered the remainder of their own by her scathing reply.

The very fact of the girl being so unattainable only enhanced her value in the eyes of the men who so longed to win her for their own.

The fruit which appears just ready to drop into one's mouth is never so highly prized as that which nods temptingly out of reach on the top of the tree.

There is always a radiant wild rose glowing at the highest point of the hedge, nodding tantalisingly on the fresh, cool breeze, always a higher honour in the game of life than those which oneself has with much difficulty obtained, and so the world wags on.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. COURTENAY had by no means asked Mrs. Vivian to plead his cause with the fair Cecil. He was a man who preferred to do all his love-making for himself. He was not much of a believer in a proxy at any time, least of all on such an occasion.

He knew now where to find the radiant vision he had seen, and he was meditating how he could best manage to locate himself in the neighbourhood of her home. Had it been in a town he could easily have found some pretext. There was not the slightest need for him to work for a living, for he was very well off; but he would cheerfully have secured a post of some description in any town, if that would have brought him nearer to Cecil; and whatever work he undertook would have been thoroughly well done, for Basil was not a man who ever did things by halves.

However, Cecil Grantley lived in the country, seemingly, and at this season there were not any very good excuses for a visit to the country, unless, indeed, he did the thing very thoroughly by buying hunters, and identifying himself with the county gentlemen. This, he decided, would draw more notice upon himself than he desired at the present time. He had had some experience of country match-making, among other things. To take a house in the neighbourhood, and settle down would be to give a sort of invitation to the feminine managers. True, he quite intended to try his chance with Cecil at the very earliest opportunity, but he felt that he must not be too hasty, undue haste would spoil everything. Had he been an artist, he thought rather ruefully, his path would have been plain enough. He could have presented himself at that village with a big paint box, and cavel, and the usual paraphernalia.

"He was but a landscape painter," the villagers would think, however little of the "village maiden" there might be about the fair, self-possessed Cecil; but Basil was quite aware that he did not know cobalt from burnt sienna, a mahl-stick from a T-square, so that was out of the question.

He thought of trying his hand at writing verses. He modestly called them "verses," not "poetry;" but he had a dim idea that poets who roamed amid beautiful scenery, composing verses in its praise, were expected to produce said verses for public appreciation, or were regarded as base impostors.

Basil was very musical, and could play the organ magnificently when he found himself before a good instrument; but even if an organist were required in the neighbourhood of Cecil's home he felt that, to put the matter on the very lowest grounds, he could not tie himself down to the continual uninterrupted work; for an organist is as much bound to be in his place at stated times as any other official connected with a church.

He knew something of civil engineering, "surveying," and such like, but that sort of thing required more regular routine than he felt prepared to undertake. It was too early for fishing, but that seemed almost his only excuse, and

though he did not much care about the sport, feeling rather inclined to agree with the definition of it usually accredited to Dr. Johnson, "a worm at one end and a fool at the other," he decided that it must afford him an excuse for want of a better.

He had an idea that the river Dart ran somewhere near Cecil's home. He hoped there was a river, anyhow, for there is always a chance of catching fish in a running stream; whereas, to settle himself deliberately to fish some pond or other, with the probability of being informed by some grinning rustic that there was "nowt but tadpoles in it" was a course of action which most decidedly did not recommend itself to the man of the world; though he felt, rather ruefully, that this sudden but perfectly sincere and deep love of his was likely to land him in an ocean of perplexities before he had done with it.

At all events he could now indulge in instant action, and he felt that anything was better than "idle thought" in the present impatient and unsettled state of his man's mind. He could at least go out and buy a lot of fishing-tackle.

And this is what Basil did, going in for all the latest improvements in rod and line, fishing baskets, tackle of all descriptions; bait-can and artificial bait, also a copy of the work of the old Staffordshire celebrity, Isaac Walton, whose "Compleat Angler" must have afforded food for reflection in the case of many and many a thoughtful fisherman.

Basil had obtained a suit of rough heather-mixture, with knicker-bockers, ribbed stockings and all the rest of it.

As he stood before a long glass in his bedroom, inspecting himself, he laughed to see how completely he looked the character he had assigned to himself. He had even strapped on the fishing-basket, and now stood with his rod in one hand, his bait-can in the other, and a fly-hook, the picture of a stalwart fisherman, feeling something like the actor-fisher on a stage when the inevitable gallery-boy calls out,—

"Pull up, guv'nor, you've got a bite!"

"I really believe I shall enjoy the thing itself," thought Basil, with some amusement; and, being a lover of out-door life in any form, like most healthy athletic men, it was quite possible that he would end by enjoying the sport which he had merely commenced as a ruse.

The young man began to feel on the tip-toes of expectation. Very soon now he might find himself on speaking terms with that beautiful girl!

He had not told Mrs. Vivian what he intended to do, for he was quite determined not to draw anyone else into his conspiracy. He would manage everything himself, and if he failed he would have no one but himself to blame. He would also be quite sure that every possible method had been tried; no fear that he would omit anything likely to advance his cause.

Failure, however, is an ominous word seldom inscribed upon the mental tablets of the young and strong and hopeful. It is only later on, when taught by stern experience that they admit there may be any such thing.

And had they realized the fact earlier, they would have probably have failed all the sooner, too heavily handicapped by the thought of future possibilities.

When the young man found himself at the station, positively asking for a ticket for Marlton, Devonshire, he could scarcely believe in his own good fortune.

He was a man who, while perfectly well able to draw a hard and fast line, beyond which no inquisitive chance acquaintance should intrude, was at the same time always ready to meet any kind and courteous advances half-way, or to make the same to any young fellow who required "drawing out."

"There is something so superior about Courtenay," said one of these youths on one occasion, "and yet he never seems to know it himself; never gives himself any airs, and all that sort of thing, you know; always seems to think that the fellow to whom he is talking is quite his equal in every way."

And it was perhaps this happy knack which had

made Basil the universal favourite he undoubtedly was.

The train started, and he settled down in his comfortable first class compartment, taking up one of the bundles of papers with which he had provided himself; but it soon slipped from his grasp, and he gave himself up to pleasurable anticipation, and while he was rapidly borne along by the swift train, Cecil Grantley, down at Marlton, was having an hour's practice on the organ in the pretty village church, for, like Basil himself, she was intensely fond of music.

Closing and locking the instrument at last, and dismissing the blower with a shilling, Cecil locked the church door, and then took the key to the sexton's cottage.

Here she lingered for a little conversation with her old nurse, the sexton's wife, who, having lived with "the family," as she called them, in London, possessed a certain refinement of air and speech rather above her present station.

An unusual object in one of the cottage windows caught Cecil's eye as she walked briskly up the pathway leading to the door, over which in the sweet summer time hung such beautiful clusters of monthly roses; this was a large square card, on which was inscribed the stereotyped announcement, "Lodgings to Let."

"I see you are looking out for lodgers, Susan," she said presently, after talking to the woman on other subjects for a few minutes.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Susan, with a look towards the card. "You see, my Jim has regular work now, and things are fairly comfortable, but as he says, and I'm of the same mind, there's nothing like putting by for a rainy day while we're young and strong. We've got the parlour nicely furnished, and a good bedroom above it, and the staircase runs up from the bit of a hall, so as a lodger could get up and down easy without having to come through our part of the house before he could get to his bedroom, as is the way so many of the cottages round here are built. There's often some young gentlemen coming down in the summer for the fishing, and there's nowhere but the 'public' for them to put up; not as I've nought to say against the landlord of the 'Seven Stars,' but he's got enough to do without having folks traipsing in and out for hot meals; and his house can't be quiet like mine is, and if I get a good lodger I'll make him comfortable as long as he likes to stop."

"A very good plan, Susan," said Miss Grantley, cordially; "if I hear of anyone requiring rooms I shall certainly send them to you."

It was beginning to get dusk now, and Cecil turned homeward.

She had to pass the railway station on her way, and while doing so a sudden thought struck her.

Entering the office she looked round, and not seeing the station-master, passed through to the platform, where she saw him bending over his flower-borders, which at this season displayed little, except clumps of neatly-kept evergreens, red-berried varieties, and here and there a cluster of late crocus, purple or yellow.

"I only came in for a minute in passing, Mr. Saunders," said Cecil, politely, as the man came forward, raising his hat, "just to say that if you hear of any gentlemen requiring lodgings in the village this summer will you please send them to Susan Mellor's cottage, she wants to let a couple of rooms, and you know what a capable tidy woman she is! Anyone would be comfortable there, or if not, it would not be her fault."

"Ah, she's a good sort, is Susan Mellor," said the station-master readily. "I'll be sure to remember it, Miss Grantley. It's getting about time for some of the gentlemen to come down for the fishing, though to be sure it's a bit early yet. However, if they come, and catch rheumatism instead of fish, I reckon it's their own look-out. Men must be catching something, or they're not happy."

And with this brief comment on the habits of mankind Saunders, who was a bit of a philosopher, and had himself "caught a Tartar" in the shape of the present Mrs. Saunders, turned to look at the signal-box.

"Ah, here comes the London train," he said, as a puff of white smoke rose from the lower end

of the long valley. A couple of porters made their appearance at this instant, and the sleepy little station woke up, to receive the coming train.

CHAPTER V.

"I do not think that anyone I know is coming down to-day," thought Cecil; "but I may as well wait, now I am here, and see who arrives, and then I must run home, for it is getting dark now."

Presently the train drew up in the station, and as it did so, some strange unaccustomed feeling came over Cecil, for which she was ever afterwards at a loss to account.

"No, I will not stay, after all," she decided, and hurried away, out into the road again. In the direction of her home the road began to ascend immediately on leaving the station, and as Cecil walked quietly along she looked down upon the platform, between the bare branches of the spreading trees, which made such a leafy avenue in the sweet summer time.

On that platform, talking to the station-master, stood the only passenger who had alighted, and Cecil speedily decided that her eyes had never rested on a more handsome man, tall, dark, commanding-looking, with dark hair and heavy moustache; Basil Courtenay, in fact.

Basil had that air of command which women love, until the commands interfere with their own personal freedom and enjoyment. Then they call it tyranny.

Cecil was just above the station, on the ascending road, and could hear all that was said.

"Can you tell me if good lodgings are to be found here?" asked the stranger, in a deep rich voice.

"Well, now, that's queer!" blurted out the surprised Saunders, staring at the questioner.

"A young lady, living near here, a Miss Grantley, has just been asking me to recommend some rooms to anyone asking for them. One of her old servants wants to let lodgings, a very good sort of woman. She's just gone up the road, Miss Grantley I mean."

And he pointed over his shoulder to the road, almost the very place where Cecil was peeping through the tree-trunks; but on overhearing this, the young lady flashed behind a holly-hedge, before the delighted traveller had time to look round. The next instant she was scuttling swiftly away, her thoughts very busy with the handsome man she had seen.

Well, if he arranged to lodge at Susan Mellor's house it was very certain that she would have to cease her visits to that young woman for a time. If Susan wanted her for anything she must come up to the house.

This was a course of action most decidedly opposite to that which would have been pursued by most of the surrounding young ladies, Cecil was quite aware of that.

Some girls living in a house on the top of the hill would probably very soon discover that they wanted Susan Mellor to do some sewing for them, for she filled up her spare time with all the needle-work she could obtain. As a rule, these girls, the Misses Venables, were not wont to patronize village talent. They were accustomed to observe loftily that it was impossible to obtain such clothing as they were in the habit of wearing, except in London or Paris. Their enemies, however, maliciously observed that their toilettes did not bear the stamp of either of the great dress marts, unless, indeed, they dealt at second or third-rate emporiums, and so obtained cheap costumes, which they dignified by the titles of London and Paris goods.

It was tolerably certain that they would graciously employ Susan Mellor, by way of an excuse for calling at her cottage occasionally. At present, though, they were in complete ignorance of the new arrival; the coming of such a striking personage as Basil Courtenay. This was not Cecil's way.

Miss Grantley, without being either cold or distant, except when she found it necessary, had never gone an inch out of her way in her life to meet any man. To be sure there was no need

for her to do so. They ran after her fast enough. She was only too glad of a little peace.

Even Cecil, however, became conscious that she was taking unusual interest in her toilette before going into the village on the following day, and was so annoyed to discover herself yielding to the same impulses which she so despised in other girls that she deliberately replaced in the wardrobe a new dress she had just taken down, and drew out a plain dark green one, which she had already worn for some time. She was quite aware, though, how well it suited her, and when, after luncheon, she started off to the post-office, to buy some stamps, it would have been hard to find a more lovely girl anywhere.

The short dark green skirt was edged with brown fur, beneath which showed a pair of small serviceable buttoned boots; a close-fitting dark green jacket, also edged with fur, displayed the lovely figure; round the white throat was placed a long thick bos of dark fur, secured by a velvet bow, and thence falling in two long ends almost to the ground. On the golden hair was perched a green felt hat. Her well-gloved hands were placed in a small muff suspended by a cord from her neck, except when the right one was withdrawn to make use of the walking-stick with its curved handle which the girl found so useful for pelling down wild roses from the hedges in summer, blackberries in autumn, bits of ivy or holly in winter.

In the post-office, buying stamps, and making a few cursory remarks about the village, stood the handsome man whom Cecil had seen on the previous day, and as soon as she saw him she slipped quietly away to wait until he had left the office.

Presently, quite unaware of the near neighbourhood of the very girl he so longed to see, Basil came out into the street again, and was turning towards the reading-room, for he had just been informed that this enlightened village positively possessed one, daily supplied with the London papers, when he caught sight of that fair, never-to-be-forgotten form in the distance, and immediately gave chase, walking quietly along in the same direction, with an air of well-bred indifference; though he was absolutely utterly unconscious of any other object he was passing.

He could only pass the girl on the road, or walk behind her until she reached her destination; he was quite aware of that. Still, that was much better than not seeing her at all, though it was tantalising enough. He was uncommonly glad to see that the beauty was quite alone, though he rather wondered at the fact. At all events there was no other fellow hanging round her.

Ah—h, though, who was this?

For at this point in Basil's meditations a young man jumped lightly over a stile at the side of the road, and approached the young lady, exclaiming—

"Is it really you? How very glad I am to see you again!"

Basil could not catch the girl's reply; but he had heard enough.

This was her lover, of course. He might have known a girl like that would have a lover. No doubt she had dozens; but this was the favoured one.

Mrs. Vivian had evidently not known of his existence; but then Mrs. Vivian did not know everything.

The man was very good-looking, too, thought Basil, savagely scanning the tall form and the handsome face as the new comer looked back for an instant—good-looking, but rather foppish and conceited.

Well, he, Basil, had seen enough. He did not know why he had come meandering down to this deserted village when there was always so much fun going on in town.

This girl was evidently engaged, and it was not the slightest use for himself to attempt to win her.

He did not want to see any more of them, and he forged ahead of the couple and walked quickly

on in front, but not too quickly to overhear the man's voice say, carelessly,—

"Hullo! whom have we here! Rather a sporting cut about him!"

"He looks a thorough gentleman," said Cecil, instantly. She spoke in a quiet voice, not in the least intending the stranger to overhear her; but Basil's hearing was unusually good, and the words reached him very distinctly, though he was fully aware that the girl had not intended them to do so.

"Bless her!" he thought, in return for her quick and ready appreciation of his character; "a gentleman, she thinks me! Well, she shall always find me one, if only I may have the happiness of showing her all that I can be, all that she could make of me. I have heard it said that men are much what women make them, and though I myself should be sorry to think that any woman could entirely change my character I am quite sure that yonder girl could mould me to her will at the present time, and, indeed, for as long as she chose to exert her influence. It is an awful state of things; but you are fairly caught and caged, Basil, my boy."

And he walked on consoled by her good opinion at all events.

Mr. Courtenay had come to terms with Susan Mellor, whose rooms suited him very well, and who was such an uncommonly good cook.

Basil was no gourmand, but he certainly appreciated a well-cooked dinner, however plain.

At first Basil felt triumphant to find himself almost daily gazing on that beautiful girl; but he speedily realised how very unsatisfactory and tantalising it all was. He knew absolutely none of the surrounding gentry.

He had hoped to discover some chance acquaintance among them; but as he looked round the well-filled church on the first Sunday after his arrival at this pretty village he saw not a single face he knew, except that one which was becoming altogether too much for his peace of mind.

Cecil Grantley was there in a seat near the chancel. Once she turned and met the full eager gaze of those handsome eyes. After that she was almost immovable, never once looking round.

Several people wondered who the tall distinguished-looking stranger might be.

The Vicar was away at this time, and his place was filled by an old college friend of his who had wandered through Egypt, among other places, and picked up a large number of valuable relics, which he was never tired of examining, and which travelled with him everywhere.

Martha, one of the Vicarage servants, had nearly been frightened out of her senses by the sudden apparition of a grinning stuffed monkey, which, at first sight, she believed to be alive, and which the antiquarian had propped up on the top of a small bookcase in the study, without the slightest idea of startling anyone.

"Antiquesman or not, the man is a silly old idiot!" said Martha, wrathfully, when she returned to the kitchen.

The antiquarian's eyes roved idly over Cecil's beautiful face, when he met her in the village, scarcely seeming to see it, though had it been an ancient relic, a scarabæus, some dilapidated remnant, he would have regarded it with positive delight.

Cecil was an only child, living with her widowed mother, a quiet, rather saddened woman, who had never seemed to recover her health and spirits after the sudden shock of her husband's death.

Cecil's father had been killed in the hunting-field. He had gone riding out, strong and well, looking "as though the world belonged to him," as someone said afterwards.

He was brought home dead, and a few days later was laid to rest in the only portion of the earth which could now be called his own—that grave in the village churchyard.

In Mrs. Grantley's eyes one still seemed to see the reflection of that stony stare of horror with which she had met the man who carried home the dead body of her fondly loved husband, seven years ago.

Cecil was at school at the time, and so missed the shock of that fatal catastrophe.

CHAPTER VI.

THE man who had so excited Basil's jealous wrath was Bertram Cheveley, the son of Squire Cheveley, of the Grange, a large handsome old-fashioned house, surrounded by a deep moat, which stood on the outskirts of the village.

There was no Mrs. Cheveley now. Between her masterful husband and her headstrong son she had been fairly worried out of life some twelve years ago.

The Squire never replaced her, contenting himself with alternately spoiling and bullying her son, who had brief spells of unbounded liberty, counterbalanced by close imprisonment, for some boyish disobedience or misdemeanour, until he was old enough to take matters into his own hands, and defy parental government for good and all.

He was the better able to do this as he was entirely his own master, not dependent on the Squire for anything.

His mother's fortune had passed on to him, and he was doing his best to make "ducks and drakes" of it.

The Squire already had more money than he required for his own wants, though these were by no means small ones.

He had never cared to interfere with Bertram's money matters. It was very seldom now that the young man was to be found at home, and his presence there now was entirely due to the fact of Cecil Grantley living in the neighbourhood.

From the first day he had seen her Bertram had loved her, with the wild jealous passion he dignified by the name of Love.

He had already told Cecil of this love, and his offer had been kindly but firmly refused. Still, he would not give in.

"I shall win her yet, if I only persevere," he thought.

Not a word of this hope, however, did he breathe to Cecil, and she, believing that he had given up all idea of anything beyond friendship, allowed him to remain on terms of friendly intimacy with her.

Had she known all that was in his mind she would scarcely have spoken to him again, but there is, and ever must be, an impenetrable veil fixed between the thoughts of friends, acquaintances, and even lovers.

A great deal may be said and imparted, but there is almost always something which is kept in reserve, never told, never even hinted at, to the very dearest friend.

While Bertram Cheveley seemed to acquiesce quietly in Cecil's decision, calmly accepting the inevitable, sternly keeping his love out of sight, and meeting the girl on a mere friendly footing, he was continually vowing to himself that she should marry him someday or other; or at all events that she should never belong to any other man.

Even had Cecil remained without a lover she would never have married Bertram Cheveley, and it was not long before the girl was compelled to acknowledge to herself that she had a lover, and a most devoted one too.

The chance which is said to come always to those who wait came at last to Basil Courtenay, and very promptly he availed himself of it.

On one of those warm spring days when the whole earth seemed renewed and freshened, the young man went fishing, by way of keeping up the character he had assigned himself.

He had caught several fish, some of them large ones, and was beginning to thoroughly enjoy the pursuit he had commenced as merely a means to an end; all the time, though, he was wondering where Cecil was that day, and what she was doing.

Suddenly he caught sight of the fair object of his thoughts walking along the path on the opposite side of the river.

Basil gazed longingly towards her. He thought she did not see him, but Cecil was quite aware of his presence, and carefully looked in every direction but the place where he stood. She saw him all the time in that mysterious manner in which people can see things and persons without actually looking at them.

Cecil wore one of her favourite dark green costumes, but her furs were discarded now the weather was warmer.

Presently the girl spied a root of fern, a rather rare variety, growing on the bank near the water, and tried to reach it, quite unaware that the part of the bank on which she was standing was very insecure. It began to shake and crumble away. Cecil instantly realised her danger and sprang back, but in doing so, lost her balance, and fell forward into the deep dark water. One loud despairing cry she gave, the next instant she was swept away beneath the flood, just as a second splash was heard; for Basil had seen all. Instantly tossing off his coat and vest he had plunged wildly into the river, and was now swimming as he had never done before, to reach that drowning girl.

Cecil had been swept into a deep pool between some rocks, and when Basil reached the spot, she was nowhere to be seen. In an agony he swam hither and thither, not daring to strike out too vigorously lest his boots should dash against that fair, sweet face. At last his groping hands touched a submerged form, and with a cry of delight Basil realised that he had found the girl.

Was he too late? He conveyed his motionless burden to land, placed the girlish form on the bank, scrambled out and knelt beside her.

There was not a sign of life. Basil's heart beat so loudly that he could hear it in the awful silence; but that other heart was still. He threw himself down by the quiet form.

"My love, my love! Have I found you only to lose you at once?" he cried in despair.

At that instant the sweet, blue eyes unclosed, and looked up wonderingly into the man's handsome face.

Cecil lived! Basil poured out lavish exclamations of delight.

Cecil raised herself against his supporting arm.

"You saved me! You saved me!" she murmured, her beautiful eyes shining with gratitude. "I shall never, never forget it as long as I live."

Much more she would have said; eager words of thanks came pouring out; but Basil, who had by this time recovered himself, on finding her still alive, begged her to go home at once, and hurried her away across the meadows to her mother's house.

Mrs. Grantley was sitting near the window of her morning-room when the couple crossed the garden, and instantly realised that an accident of some kind had happened, for Cecil was trembling from cold and excitement, and Basil was partly supporting her.

Remembering the horror of her husband's death, unable to realise that at all events Cecil was alive and standing before her, Mrs. Grantley promptly fainted away.

Unaware of this Cecil put her head around the door, saying—

"I am too wet to come in, mother, dear. I have had an accident. Come and thank this gentleman for saving the life of your careless daughter."

There was no answer, and looking inside the room Cecil saw her mother extended on the floor, to all appearance senseless.

Then ensued a scene of wild confusion, bells ringing, maids running here and there, all sorts of remedies hastily applied. Basil began to think that the lady must certainly be dead, as he had thought in Cecil's case, when, like her daughter, she suddenly revived and started up, crying in heartrending tones,—

"Cecil, Cecil, are you safe?"

"Yes, yes, quite safe. I am here," replied Cecil, soothingly.

Mrs. Grantley leaned back in the easy chair in which they had placed her, and murmured feeble words of thankfulness.

"I must run and take off these wet clothes, or there will be a small pool in the room," said Cecil, speaking far more lightly than she felt, by way of reassuring her mother.

"To say nothing of your chance of a severe cold," supplemented Basil, looking uneasily at her.

"And you, too, you are dripping with water," said the girl, regretfully.

"I am rather damp," assented Basil, so joyously that they looked at him in amazement. The fact was that the happy man was fairly bubbling over with delight.

He had been longing so ardently only to speak to this fair girl; and now he had held her in his arms, he had actually saved her life!

"I will go and get out of these wet clothes," he continued, his eyes shining as he looked at his ruined "heather-mixture suit," "then I will call again this evening, if I may, just to assure myself that you are none the worse."

And he looked very anxiously at Cecil.

"Yes, do come; I have not yet thanked you, but my head is in a whirl," said Mrs. Grantley, plaintively; and though Basil instantly declared that he wanted no thanks, that he was already more than repaid by his own intense pleasure in having been at hand and able to help, he gladly promised to come again, and then dashed off, feeling perfectly jubilant, to electrify Susan Mellor by presenting himself in a dripping state at her back door.

When the good woman understood that he had positively saved her favourite Miss Cecil from a terrible death she all but hugged him in her delight.

She bustled about, getting warm water, dry clothing, hot drinks, and presently Basil was sitting before a large fire in the kitchen, feeling none the worse for the sudden immersion, and very much the better for the totally unexpected meeting with the fair object of his fervent dreams and the immeasurable service he had been able to render her.

It was indeed "a lucky accident."

CHAPTER VII.

THAT same evening, when Basil judged that dinner would be over at Beech Court, Mrs. Grantley's house, he started off in that direction.

Living in the free-and-easy style he now affected in Susan's cottage, the young man had not troubled himself to dress for dinner, naturally, but he now congratulated himself on his forethought in bringing an evening suit with him.

He remembered now, with a smile, how he had hesitated before packing it with the remainder of his clothes, thinking that it would never be required.

It was by no means his best, but he looked uncommonly well in it, as he strolled into Susan's kitchen before starting.

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed that worthy woman, staring admiringly at him, "you look for all the world as if you was off to a London ball, sir."

Basil laughed gaily as he drew on a light overcoat and departed, leaving Susan looking after him with a very meaning expression.

"He's after Miss Cecil already, I'll be bound. My! shouldn't I like the chance of dancing at their wedding!" she thought, in much delight.

Basil had much feared that Cecil would not be visible after her immersion, and was trying to resign himself to the possibility of a lengthy interview with her mother, and resolving to do his very best to creep into that lady's good opinion; but when he entered Mrs. Grantley's drawing-room, looking very handsome and distinguished, he found both ladies present.

Mrs. Grantley had advised Cecil to put on one of her warmer gowns if she came down at all that evening, and Cecil, who most decidedly did not intend to remain upstairs while there was a chance of her gallant rescuer presenting himself at their house, had looked out a black velvet robe slightly open at the neck, round which fell a deep frill of rich white lace, as also from the elbow sleeves.

The girl was sitting near the fire in a cushioned wicker-work chair, and Basil thought he had never seen a more lovely picture, as the firelight danced on her white throat and arms and flickered over her golden hair. The brilliant colour he had so admired on first seeing her

had deserted her fair face for the present—the shock caused by her late peril, but a faint flush dawned as the young man came forward, looking so earnestly at her.

"My love wears a golden crown," he was thinking as he saw the coils of shining hair wound round and round on the top of that pretty head, a mass of soft short curls straying round the corners of the white brow, but not falling over it.

Mrs. Grantley herself looked very handsome and matronly in black satin and rich lace. She seemed roused out of her habitual melancholy this evening, as her daughter thought.

As they sat there, over the dainty tea-cups and the fragrant tea, Basil thought he had never spent a pleasanter hour.

The ladies successfully concealed their surprise at the distinguished appearance of their visitor in his well-cut evening clothes. Basil looked eminently aristocratic, and as he talked on easily about people and places, mentioning many names of persons with whom they were well acquainted, and whom they had frequently met in society, they became very interested.

As for Basil, he was falling more deeply in love every minute, and well he knew it. Cecil naturally thought that Basil had been quite unaware of the fact of her existence until he saw her in this village.

Basil was longing to tell her how and where his eyes had first lighted on her, and that it was entirely for her sake he had come down to Devonshire, but he decided to delay this communication, at all events, until they were alone.

Presently he considerably astonished both mother and daughter by quietly mentioning Mrs. Vivian's name.

He was looking at some prettily-carved photograph frames on a small table near him.

"Ah, I have seen one like this, or very much like it, in town," he said, carelessly, taking up one of the frames. "One of my friends had bought some, and was showing them to me not long since, a Mrs. Vivian. She is always picking up curiosities of all sorts."

As a fact, his own photograph, in one of these frames, adorned Mrs. Vivian's writing-table.

"Oh, do you know Mrs. Vivian?" exclaimed Mrs. Grantley, in surprise.

"Mrs. Vivian, of Greville-gardens?" supplemented Cecil, breathlessly.

"Yes, we are very well acquainted; she is always most kind to me," replied Basil, smiling at their amazement.

Mrs. Grantley felt considerably relieved. If he knew Mrs. Vivian, and was on visiting terms with her, they might freely admit him to their country home.

She well knew in what an exclusive set Mrs. Vivian moved.

"Here is Mrs. Vivian herself!" said Basil presently, as he looked over a large photograph album which Cecil had fetched from the other side of the room, and came suddenly upon a very good cabinet photograph of that lady.

Then there was no mistake. It was their own friend, Mrs. Vivian, whom he knew.

After this discovery the conversation speedily became quite confidential.

Basil had a further surprise in store for the young lady, but that must wait.

All the luck was on his side now, he decided presently, for Mrs. Grantley was called away for a few minutes to see a woman who had been sent to her with a message from one of her lady friends in the neighbourhood.

Instantly Basil seized the opportunity.

"I have a confession to make to you, Miss Grantley," he said, turning towards Cecil; "you think, do you not, that I never saw you until I came to this village?"

"Certainly I was under that impression," replied Cecil, opening her eyes in some surprise, and colouring vividly as she met the man's earnest gaze.

"Do you recollect going to Lady Holdford's dance while you were staying with Mrs. Vivian?"

"Yes, of course I do; but you were not there. We did not meet anywhere," replied Cecil, more and more surprised.

"Nevertheless, I saw you that night," returned

Basil calmly: "It was a fancy dress affair, and you went as 'Undine,' and looked simply exquisite."

The girl's look of astonishment became almost comic.

"I certainly dressed as 'Undine,' she said, slowly, "but I do not at all remember seeing you there. What character did you represent?"

"An entirely anonymous and invisible one," replied Basil, mischievously. "I was not at the house at all; yet I saw you as 'Undine.'"

Cecil was not sorry to hear this. She knew she had been the acknowledged belle of that ball. All her partners had informed her of that fact, and, as she saw afterwards, their unanimous verdict had been most flatteringly endorsed by the society papers.

Still, she was sure she had not seen Basil Courtenay.

After thoroughly enjoying her perplexity Basil told Cecil how he had seen her standing in the hall, talking to Mrs. Vivian, before starting.

"It was awfully rude of me, but I stood still outside, and stared my hardest," he said, and Cecil blushed again. She was by no means given to blushing, as a rule; but even society girls can blush, when the right man comes along; and there was no mistaking Basil's earnestness and sincerity.

"Mrs. Vivian told me where you lived," he continued, "and as you see, I availed myself of the information."

The inference was plain. Cecil knew now why he had settled in this quiet village. She herself was his lodestone, his guiding star.

For her, then, he had come down here. To see her, to become acquainted with her, he had left all the town pleasures and gaieties, his amusements, his friends, his clubs, and settled down contentedly in Susan's homely cottage.

Once again, to her annoyance, Cecil felt herself flushing rosy red.

Mrs. Grantley wrote to Mrs. Vivian on the following day, giving her a full account of the terrible danger from which Cecil had been rescued by Basil Courtenay. Mrs. Vivian was naturally very much shocked, and very thankful for the girl's escape.

She could think of nothing else, and wrote a long letter to Mrs. Vivian, and a shorter one to Cecil, begging her to be more careful in future.

"If you want fern roots, my dear," she concluded, "my gardener shall supply you with any number; but do let me beg of you to leave the wild ones growing in whatever dangerous position nature has placed them, without endangering your precious life by trying to reach them unaided."

There was little fear that Cecil would ever act so incautiously again—never, so long as she lived, would she forget the horror of that awful moment, when she had felt herself falling, falling, into that deep, dark rapid, river.

When Mrs. Vivian recovered from the first shock of the news she began to feel much amused on discovering how thoroughly Basil Courtenay was now established as prime favourite in Cecil's home. Basil himself wrote to Mrs. Vivian, modestly alluding to his own good fortune in having been at hand just when Miss Grantley required assistance, and telling her how delighted he was to find himself on terms of such friendly intimacy with the mother and daughter.

"A dozen introductions could not have effected one half so much as that lucky accident," he wound up.

"I leave you to judge what would have been my feelings had Cecil been drowned, but as she escaped, and is none the worse, to all appearance, for the cold plunge, I am inclined to think that Fate has been very kind to us."

In her letter to Mrs. Grantley Mrs. Vivian spoke most highly of Basil Courtenay.

She discreetly said nothing of his intense love for Cecil, for she judged that the young man was perfectly well able to plead his cause for himself; but she told Mrs. Grantley how very much she herself liked him, and that she was firmly convinced he was all that was true and honourable.

She also told Mrs. Grantley all she knew of his mother's family, which she was quite aware

was one of very good position, a "county family," in fact.

"I believe there is only one life between Basil and a baronetcy," she wrote, "and though I should be the last to advise any counting upon contingencies, especially such a grave one as a death, still the fact remains that he may one day be in a very good position; even better than his present one, which I should consider quite good enough for a daughter of my own, had I been blest with one."

This letter completely dispelled all Mrs. Grantley's cautious fears, the outcome of her motherly love, and from henceforth she treated Basil with an amount of freedom and kind attention which he found very pleasant and gratifying.

Certainly no man had a better right to Cecil's love than he who had saved her life.

The only person who did not join in the universal admiration and praise of Basil Courtenay at the present time was Bertram Cheveley. He felt positively wild when he realised what an immeasurable advantage Basil's clever feat had given him. Of course the girl would think that she was bound to marry her brave preserver, if he asked her to do so, as there was little doubt he would, and he, Bertram, had felt quite convinced that he should win her in the end for himself.

Cecil had never given him the very slightest encouragement; in fact, on every possible occasion she had striven to show him how very distasteful his florid attentions were to her.

Bertram, however, had chosen to assume that this was either the natural coyness of a refined girl, or a coquettish scheme to draw him on. Miss Grantley was probably quite as well aware as most girls of the fact that a little judicious coldness towards an eager lover has much the same effect as a gust of cold wind on an ascending fire. It merely fans it to a fiercer flame, just as the assumed coldness draws the man on and on till he takes the final plunge which shall ultimately land him in the safe haven of matrimony, or cruelly wreck him on the barren shore of a hopeless refusal.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE days that followed were very happy ones. All the same, Basil Courtenay was undergoing a continual strain.

It was very difficult to keep back the words which rose constantly to his lips whenever he was alone with Cecil.

He was longing to tell her of his love. It seemed an affair of long-standing to himself by this time. He had thought so incessantly of this fair girl ever since he had seen her passing through that brightly-lighted hall, while he lingered in the black darkness outside; but the idea of this love, so old to himself, would be new, entirely new, to Cecil.

He must wait patiently. In the strange humility which had come to him lately, with this overpowering love, Basil was quite unconscious of the power of his striking personality. He was one of those men who do not often woo in vain.

Basil could school his tongue by a great and continual effort; but he could not control his eyes, and they spoke a very fervent love-language when they rested on the face of that beautiful girl.

It is more than probable that Cecil was fully aware of his love long before he spoke of it, though when Mrs. Grantley remarked one day,—

"I really believe Mr. Courtenay is in love with you, Cecil," the young hypocrite looked up in surprise and calmly replied,—

"Oh, dear no, you must be quite mistaken, mother, dear."

All the same, Cecil knew that her heart was passing out of her own keeping.

She was well aware that she was being rapidly drawn towards this strong, tender, masterful man, whose eyes rested on her with such a look of worship in their dark depths.

About this time Basil had a letter from his friend Dane Vereker. Dane knew perfectly well where Basil was, but had not an idea why he had

located himself in that part of the country. It was such an out-of-the-way place to go to on a fishing excursion. He could have put him up to lots of sport in other resorts.

On that day when Dane had met Cecil at Mrs. Vivian's house the girl had not happened to mention in what part of the country her home was situated, and Basil had carefully abstained from mentioning Cecil when he wrote to Dane.

Now, as it happened, Dane Vereker was an enthusiastic fisherman, and when he read Basil's glowing accounts of his successful expeditions, and the weight and size of the fish he had caught, including a tantalising description of a monster which had "got away" ("I shall have him yet," wrote Basil), Dane felt wildly desirous of fishing that stream himself.

He was well provided with tackle of all sorts, so was not obliged to carefully hunt it all up in the shops, as Basil had done.

He wrote to inform Basil that he would join him on the following day, and asked him to secure rooms for him at the village inn.

Dane Vereker was Basil's chief friend, but at the present time he wished him at Kamachatha.

However, there was nothing for it but to do as his friend had requested, and Basil went to the inn to secure rooms.

Perhaps, if Dane caught a lot of fish, he would stick to the river and leave him alone, he thought; if he came monopolising Cecil Basil was quite aware that not all their long friendship would prevent a serious quarrel between them.

Both had hot tempers and very strong wills, and woman, lovely woman, has been a bone of contention, throughout all ages, from Cleopatra down to the time of Mary Queen of Scots, and beyond; down to the present age, in fact.

Basil already had one rival down here, or so he thought, in the person of Bertram Cheveley, who was always "loafing about," as Basil contemptuously reflected.

Bertram never seemed to have any occupation on hand. He wandered about, in a desultory manner, with a mongrel at his heels ("the fellow does not even keep a decent dog, only a cur, like himself," thought Basil), his hands in his pockets, his hat either tipped forward over his forehead, or perched rakishly on the back of his head, a short pipe between his teeth, and a general air of complete carelessness pervading him, except when he met Basil Courtenay, and honoured him with a careful scowl.

He was always way-laying Cecil Grantley in the village, and on the high road beyond it. Basil had several times met them together, and on these occasions he ceremoniously raised his hat and passed them.

"You seemed in a great hurry this morning," said Cecil to him once, after one of these ceremonious salutations. "I wanted to ask you when your friend Mr. Vereker is coming, but you did not seem to have a minute to spare for poor me."

"I did not wish to interrupt your *little-déjeûner*," replied Basil coolly. "Is not Cheveley enough for you that you are so anxious to see Dane Vereker again?" he burst out, savagely, a minute later.

"Good Heavens, what coquettes women are!" Cecil opened her lovely eyes in astonishment.

"Really, Mr. Courtenay, you seem quite disturbed!" she said, ironically; "in a small place like this one knows everybody, of course, and as Mr. Cheveley overtook me to-day, he naturally walked along the 'Queen's highway' with me. As to Mr. Vereker, I concluded that, being a friend of yours, I might reasonably display a small amount of interest in his movements. I little thought what vials of wrath I was drawing down upon my luckless head."

"You know perfectly well—" began Basil hotly, when the door opened, and Mrs. Grantley peeped in.

"Quarrelling, my dear children!" she said, mischievously. "Oh, how naughty of you. Birds in their little nests agree, you know."

"Because, if they did not, they would 'fall out' in more senses than one; if I may use an old joke," laughed Cecil. "Mr. Courtenay, is scolding me, mother, because—"

But here Basil looked at her in such an

agonised manner that Cecil went off into fits of laughter, and as Mrs. Grantley wisely forbore to question her on her recovery the subject dropped.

Mrs. Grantley was one of those women who know when to speak, and when to be silent; a rather rare specimen of femininity.

She had at first been very cautious about allowing Basil to meet her daughter, for it was soon evident how very much attracted he was towards the girl, and Mrs. Grantley, like every mother who does her duty towards her family, was by no means inclined to behave rashly in encouraging this handsome stranger, although he had been of such signal service.

She was intensely grateful to him; but even gratitude must have a limit, if it becomes inclined to encroach upon careless freedom.

Mrs. Grantley, in her meditations concerning the young couple, tried to separate Basil's brave action, and the fact that he had saved Cecil's life, from that other fact, that of his passionate love for the girl.

This was naturally rather difficult, especially with the man's sunny, handsome, happy face so often before her; but Mrs. Grantley kept the stern necessity before her, like a Roman mother of old, never wavering, and nearly always able to convince herself that she was strictly in the right.

Bertram Cheveley's jealousy only seemed to increase.

He never made the very slightest effort to subdue it. He had never been in the habit of denying himself anything upon which he had set his heart, and he was little likely to begin now. He told himself that he was "as good a match as Basil Courtenay any day."

Dane Vereker arrived, and took possession of the rooms which Basil had secured for him at "The Maypole."

He had not told Basil by which train he intended to arrive, and after meeting two to no purpose Basil gave up all idea of seeing him that day, and went off to the river to try to catch two or three really good fish, which he might take to Mrs. Grantley as an excuse for calling that day.

He did not really need any excuse, in her estimation at least, for she always welcomed him most warmly; but Basil felt really ashamed to think how often he entered that house, and thought that he could present himself with a better grace accompanied by a string of fish.

He had already taken many of the best of his "spoils" to Mrs. Grantley, who, as she assured him, thoroughly enjoyed them, and thought of turning "fisher-woman" herself when the weather was rather warmer.

Cecil had been having early "afternoon tea" with a friend, Mabel Alwyn, and was returning alone, soon after four o'clock, when, to her intense surprise, she met Dane Vereker.

Basil had purposely refrained from telling her that he was coming down, and intended to be present when they met, to judge as far as possible, in what light Cecil regarded Dane; when taken by surprise she might not be able to conceal her real feelings with her usual success, as she would do if forewarned.

This scheme failed, like so many of the small schemes of men.

Basil Courtenay did not see the meeting; but Bertram Cheveley did, and he turned savagely away with a bitter exclamation,—

"Another of them, I suppose!"

For Cecil, thoroughly taken by surprise, blushed vividly when she met Dane Vereker so suddenly near the station, and Bertram was quite near enough to see that blush.

What on earth had Mr. Vereker come down for Cecil wondered.

She was perfectly well aware that Basil's fishing had only been an excuse for following her in the first instance.

Cecil began to feel rather amused as she wondered how many more of her admirers might be expected to make their appearance.

"I think I must suggest to the Vicar that we start a hydropathic establishment on a large scale," the girl thought wickedly.

"Have you come to explore the beauties of

nature?" she said, flippantly, as she shook hands with Mr. Vereker.

"Yes, I am looking at one of the chief of them now," replied Dane, instantly, bending his head towards her fair face, and looking most intently and unmistakably at herself alone.

"Dear me! what a pretty speech!" laughed Cecil. "I see you have improved in my absence. You must have been practising diligently upon some one else."

Dane eagerly disclaimed this; but Cecil continued, unheeding him,—

"Do let me beg you not to bewilder our village minds with idle compliments, Mr. Vereker. We are out of the world here, and I assure you that town manners and customs positively frighten us. Please be natural here!"

"I will be just anything you like," declared Vereker, with unmistakable emphasis. "Hear me swear!"

And with a cautious look around, Dane dropped on one knee on the grass at the side of the road, and gazed at her dramatically, one hand laid on the region of his heart in true theatrical style.

"Do get up, for mercy's sake," exclaimed Cecil. "I hear voices now."

Mr. Vereker scrambled to his feet in undignified haste, just as three or four young ladies came round the corner of the road. They were the Misses Venables, and their faces considerably lengthened as they caught sight of Cecil and her companion.

"Just look at that Cecil Grantley!" said Selina Venables, the eldest and scraggiest of the sisters, laying the usual obnoxious emphasis on the relative pronoun when used in an uncomplimentary sense.

"Really the way that girl carries on with first one and then another man is simply abominable. I am glad (with a virtuous sniff) that no one can talk of me going on like that!"

They certainly could not. Miss Venables seldom had the chance of affording the villagers food for gossip, though when the slightest of opportunities came her way she "carried on" to an extent compared with which Cecil's light-hearted sallies, her merriest tricks, were mild as milk.

Dane Vereker went on his way considerably enlightened after that totally unexpected meeting with Cecil Grantley.

So it was for her sake that Basil Courtenay, one of the most sociable of men, had buried himself in this remote country village. He remembered now how very enthusiastically Basil had spoken of the girl after first seeing her.

The sly fox! Then he had followed her down here and stolen a march on them all. Much he cared about fishing!

He had often heard Basil laughing at the sight of some patient angler, as they rowed rapidly past in the light outrigger in which they had had such delightful "spins" on the Thames, probably finding the fisherman in exactly the same place on their return some hours later. And now he himself had started fishing for a pastime, or rather, as a very successful "blind," behind which he could comfortably conduct fishing of another description; angling for the heart of Cecil Grantley.

Vereker resolved to "roast" his friend unmercifully when they met.

CHAPTER IX.

As Dane Vereker strolled on after meeting Cecil Grantley he began to wonder how far Basil had progressed in the good graces of that young lady.

He had been more than half in love with the girl himself in town, but if Basil had really followed her down here, and had all this time been trying to win her he had of course the prior right.

Mr. Vereker resolved to find out how the land lay on the very first opportunity, so as to run no risk of spoiling sport. He went to Basil's rooms first, though he scarcely expected to find him indoors on such a lovely day. The sun shone brightly, the birds were singing sweetly, the

green trees waved and rustled, a rivulet run between two high hills like a silvery streak, making a pleasant splash, and throwing up pearly sparkling spray as it fell into the valley. Beyond, on the higher ground, were frowning roofs and dark firs. Undulating moorland stretched away into the dim distance, strange birds swept aloft with wide-spread pinions, here and there a solitary heron stood almost motionless in a swamp.

Shaggy cattle stopped for a moment to stare at the stranger, then tossed their wicked-looking horned heads and galloped away. Dane interviewed the smiling landlady of the village inn, "The Maypole," over which in due season hung great clusters of roses and honeysuckle. He was very pleased with Basil's choice of rooms, and having inspected them, felt himself at liberty to search for his friend.

He strolled in the direction of the river, which he could see winding along, speedily caught sight of Basil's tall form, and stole quietly round behind the hedge, until he reached a point just behind him, when he stepped forward and slapped him smartly upon the shoulder, so smartly and so vigorously that Basil, thoroughly taken by surprise, was very nearly propelled into the river, which vastly amused Dane, who was feeling singularly buoyant and content at the present moment.

Having for the moment forgotten that there was any probability of his friend's appearance, and thinking himself suddenly attacked by a stranger, a tramp, perhaps, with a view to robbery and violence, Basil dropped his rod on the bank and turned round sharply, throwing himself into fighting attitude.

Then his hands dropped to his sides, and he burst into a hearty laugh.

"I might have known it was you, you mad dog!" he said, jovially. "I did not give myself time to remember that you were due."

"No, your thoughts were evidently miles away," observed Dane; "no, not miles," correcting himself, "only as far as whatever house in this neighbourhood contains—Miss Cecil Grantley!"

Basil looked up in surprise, though it was probably the mere fact of stooping for his rod which brought that dark flush to his handsome face.

"Cecil! you have seen her, then?" he said, rather blankly.

Vereker was beginning his games already, was he?

"Yes; I met her near the station," replied Dane, imperturbably.

"Now, look here, Dane," said Basil, seriously; "don't get up to any of your little tricks here. Cecil Grantley is not at all likely to be drawn into an idle flirtation; but just understand that—that I intend to win her for my wife, if possible, and, therefore, any attentions paid her by any other fellow are specially distasteful to me."

Dane stared at him in amazement. Basil Courtenay was so easy-going as a rule that this evidence of deep feeling was something quite new.

He must, indeed, be "hard hit," Vereker concluded.

"Oh, all right! I am sure I don't want to interfere with you," he said, easily. "By Jove! who is this!" he continued, waking up in keen animation, as a very pretty girl passed along the towing-path on the other side of the river.

Dane had a vision of a lovely mischievous face with twinkling grey eyes, a brilliant colour, a profusion of light brown wavy hair wound in a large coil beneath the hat, a very pretty figure, tastefully clad, and a pair of neat little boots peeping in and out as the wearer tripped lightly along, nodding and smiling across the river as Basil lifted his hat in polite salutation.

"What a little duck!" exclaimed Dane Vereker. "Now, I tell you what, Basil, that girl is far more in my line than your peerless Miss Cecil."

"All the better," returned Basil, brightening up; "that is one of Cecil's friends, old boy. Her name is Mabel Alwyn, and she lives at that pretty place yonder in the valley."

And Basil indicated with his fishing-rod the whereabouts of a large ivy-covered house some distance lower down, partly surrounded by trees.

"I will ask Cecil to bring Mabel to meet us somewhere or other one of these next days," said Basil.

"Yes, do; she is a perfect little witch I am sure," replied Dane, eagerly.

Then he turned his attention to "chaffing" Basil about his infatuation for the fair Cecil; but he broke off so many times to wonder where Miss Mabel Alwyn had gone that afternoon, and to ask Basil if he was quite sure she was not engaged to some lucky fellow or other, that at last Basil fairly turned the tables on him, and began chaffing in his turn, realising with delight that Vereker was quite as much attracted by Mabel as he himself had been in the first instance by Cecil Grantley.

Dane could "roast" him no longer with any show of reason, being himself in the same predicament.

Basil had first seen his lady-love in the brightly-lighted hall of a London residence—Vereker had met his on the banks of a country river; but the result was precisely the same in both cases, though it was probable that Dane's path to happiness would be a far shorter one than Basil's, no such difficulties presenting themselves as had encumbered that young man in his onwarch march.

Mr. Vereker was most unusually silent as the young men returned to the village; all his merry chaff seemed to have deserted him, and Basil, looking at him, wickedly murmured,—

"A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind."

As they reached Basil's temporary abode, they saw Cecil Grantley in the distance, turning a corner near the village, on her way home.

Basil was about to fly after her, when he suddenly stopped, with an air of intense disgust, as a tall man made his appearance, running swiftly to overtake Cecil.

It was Bertram Cheveley, and no friend of Basil's, as Dane Vereker saw at once.

"I shall have to give that fellow a lesson one of these days," remarked Basil, clenching his hand spasmodically. "He is always following Cecil, and way-laying her everywhere. I should just like to give him the soundest thrashing he ever had in his life."

"Looks as if it would do him good," assented Vereker, always ready to "back up" Basil in everything.

Little they either of them thought how soon Bertram Cheveley would give them an opportunity.

When Basil Courtenay next called at Beech Court he found Cecil alone in the drawing-room, and realised that at last his hour had come.

"Mother has gone to the conservatory, to snip the dead leaves off all her pet plants," said the girl as she rose to greet him, "I will go and tell her that you are here."

"No, please don't," cried Basil in much alarm, as Cecil's fingers touched the door-handle, for the girl knew well what was before her, and was partly longing to escape; only partly, however.

She came back slowly into the room.

"Listen, darling," said Basil, tenderly, taking both her hands in his, "we may be interrupted any moment, and I want to ask you something. You know how devotedly I love you, Cecil, I am sure you do. Will you be my very own, my precious wife?"

Anxiously he waited for the answer, his strong man's heart beating as it had never done before in all his recollection, his dark head bent down over the girl's golden one.

A very striking tableau, but fortunately there was no one to witness it.

It was a very softly-uttered "Yes" which at last reached the man's eager ears, and with an exclamation of rapture he caught Cecil in his arms, pressing passionate kisses on those sweet red lips, which he had often longed, only himself knew how fervently, to touch with his own.

This was the spectacle which met the astonished gaze of Mrs. Grantley as she entered the room, quite unaware that it was occupied, and, indeed, believing Cecil to be out-of-doors somewhere.

"Well, really, young people—" she began to remark, and the lovers started guiltily apart at the sound of her voice.

Basil immediately recovered himself, and led the blushing girl up to her mother.

"I have been telling Cecil how very fondly I love her, Mrs. Grantley," he said, looking very handsome, and very determined. "Will you give her to me? My one earthly hope is to have her for my wife! I faithfully promise to take care of her in every possible way."

There was little doubt that Cecil would be well protected, thought Mrs. Grantley, as she looked at the strong eager earnest man.

"Yes, Basil, you have my full consent," she said, very kindly.

And the happy young man raised her hand to his lips, with an air of old-fashioned gallantry which much became him.

Mrs. Grantley's consent had been eagerly desired; but she had been through all this herself, and had not yet forgotten her own young days.

She was quite aware that her presence, unlike her consent, was not required on the present occasion.

So that was all settled, and very speedily the tidings flew round the village.

When Bertram Cheveley heard the news he was nearly wild, and longed with all his revengeful heart to prevent that marriage.

CHAPTER X.

A WEEK or so passed on.

Dane Vereker had come down for the fishing, but it was uncommonly little fishing he did. He was always trying to meet Mabel Alwyn, and succeeding remarkably well.

Cecil had introduced the two young people to each other, and they had immediately begun to fall in love.

Mabel's father and mother were very pleased, for they would not be able to leave their daughter very well provided for, Mr. Alwyn having had some heavy losses lately. They were even now on the point of retrenching. Dane Vereker, being already rich, did not require a portion with his bride. The young man seemed all that they could desire; but they did not intend to do anything in haste.

They must know all about Dane, and know himself thoroughly, before they allowed him to marry their daughter. Meanwhile, he might visit at their house as much as he liked. Consequently, Mr. Vereker was very often to be found there.

He had come down to this village for the "fishing," and had hooked a much more valuable specimen than he had at all expected, for he proposed to Mabel in due form, and was conditionally accepted.

"We will call it an engagement when you know more of each other," said Mrs. Alwyn, wisely; "you may perhaps discover later on that Mabel is not at all suited to you."

"No fear of that!" cried Dane, joyously.

"Or Mabel may discover that you are not suited to her," observed Mabel's father, drily.

"That is much more probable!" replied the young man, with most unwonted humility.

As things went on, though, no such painful discoveries were made, though it was some time before the engagement was duly announced.

Meanwhile, Cecil and Basil were living in happiness beyond anything they had ever imagined, their love deepening day by day, if that were possible.

And all the while, nearer and nearer drew a dark ominous cloud of danger; for Bertram Cheveley had quite determined that unless he could separate the lovers in some other way he would kill Basil Courtenay. He was not at all sure that he should not kill Cecil herself, rather than allow Basil to marry her.

Bertram sat moodily in his own room one day, meditating how he could separate those two. Suddenly, his eyes fell on a case of pistols which lay upon a shelf in one corner.

"The very thing!" he muttered.

Reaching down the case he examined the pistols. They wanted cleaning, he found, for it was some time since they had been in use, and he set to work.

Bertram was quite aware that the lovers, after the manner of their kind, were in the habit of straying away to sylvan solitudes, and he resolved to make an unexpected third at one of their interviews.

The chance did not come for some days, and each day he became more desperate.

Cecil and Basil were, no doubt, wandering about together somewhere, for the weather was lovely, and they both revelled in out-door life; but Bertram could not find them.

Still he would not give up his base design. He would part those lovers, somehow, he vowed to himself.

The opportunity came at last, as opportunities, eagerly sought, and patiently waited for, come to most people, whether their aims be good or evil.

Cecil and Basil passed quietly through the village one day, and then, reaching the open country, walked along more leisurely, until they reached a small plantation which they often visited, simply because no one else ever seemed to go there.

It was a wild neglected spot, thickly-growing trees waved their dark branches overhead. Below were masses of small shrubs, tangled undergrowth ferns, and gorse, the latter stretching out over the hills beyond, on the very verge of which lay this desolate plantation.

In the middle was a small open glade, where several trees had fallen, or been blown down by some storm in its tempestuous fury.

Basil led the girl to their usual seat on one of these fallen trunks, and as he took his seat beside her, he pressed a fond kiss on her sweet red lips. As fondly she returned it.

Just then a shadow fell upon the happy lovers. They started apart in astonishment. Never yet had any rash intruder found them here.

Ah! they might have known who it was without looking round, they thought instantly, as Bertram Cheveley stepped forward and confronted them.

"For the last time, Cecil Grantley, choose between us, and in making your choice recollect that it is for life or death, as well as love," he said sternly. "If you choose Courtenay I will shoot him where he stands."

Drawing the pistol from his pocket he held it aloft.

Cecil screamed in agony and apprehension, though little given to screaming as a rule.

However, she was more courageous than most women, and, the first shock over, she faced Bertram dauntlessly.

"I will never, never marry you, Mr. Cheveley," she declared, firmly.

"Leave us here, dearest. Run home, and I will follow you," said Basil, quickly.

Never had Cecil heard him speak so sternly. He did not even look at her as he uttered the words, but that, she knew, was merely because he was so closely watching Bertram's movements.

Cecil stepped hurriedly aside among the trees, hoping that Basil might not notice how far she went. She had no intention of leaving him alone with that wild, vengeful man, though she was quite aware that she could be of little use.

There was a moment of breathless suspense as the two men faced each other. Suddenly Basil lunged himself forward on Bertram just as the latter fired.

Cecil clasped her hands in agony, but to her intense relief Basil still stood upright. And now Bertram's punishment began in real earnest.

He had missed his aim. The shot had passed far above Basil's head.

He threw the pistol savagely away, and tried to defend himself; but he was no match for Basil Courtenay. That young man's nerves and muscles were iron and steel. In a few minutes Bertram fell to the ground, and lay there senseless, stunned by Basil's last deftly planted blow.

"Oh, you have killed him!" exclaimed Cecil, shudderingly.

"Are you there, Cecil?" exclaimed Basil, in surprise; "go home, love, go home at once, this is no work for woman's eyes!"

As he spoke he turned aside and picked up the pistol which Bertram had flung away.

"Not that, not that, Basil!" said Cecil, springing forward and clinging to him.

"What did you think I was going to do?" he asked calmly; then laughed, though rather discordantly, for he felt wild with anger as he looked at the man who might have killed Cecil in his jealous rage.

"No, my dear, I am not quite such a cowardly scoundrel as our friend here! I should never dream of attacking another fellow with a pistol, unless he were armed likewise. However, if the sight of it terrifies you here it goes."

And he threw the weapon far away among the bushes, to Cecil's great relief.

Bertram began to move, and Basil drew Cecil away.

"There, you see he is not dead," he said, soothingly. "I am now going to take you home, and then I will send some man to look after him. No, I will not go near him again myself, I will stay with you," he continued, answering the look of anxiety in Cecil's eyes.

"I could not trust myself near him; that is to say, if he were in fighting condition, for I am longing to give him another thrashing."

"So long as he cannot defend himself he is, of course, safe from me; and I think I have given him enough to think about for the present."

Cecil thought so too.

Basil had disposed of the enemy, but he did not yet feel quite satisfied.

It seemed to him now that he should never know real peace and happiness until Cecil was his own, safe in his keeping, his fondly-loved wife. He had shown that he was well able to defend her, and Cecil's friends were almost as anxious as himself for her to leave this part of the country, in which Bertram might at any time be found, and to live in peace and happiness at that beautiful house which Basil had prepared for her.

By their united persuasions now, the day was fixed, at last, and Cecil consented to give into Basil's care the life he had twice saved.

There was a very pretty wedding in the village church, filled with a fashionable congregation from far and near.

None of those who witnessed the sight ever afterwards forgot Cecil's sweet lovely face, glowing beneath her bridal veil, or Basil's glad dark eyes, his upright manly form, as he proudly led his wife down the pathway to the carriage, smilingly defending her, so far as possible, from the hurricane of rice which fell around them.

And from that day there set in a cloudless, happy, love-life for both of them, husband and wife, united in the truest of all bonds, those firm and unflinching ones forged by the hands of an undying love.

[THE END.]

THE only structures in Japan which seem to be earthquake proof are the pagodas, which are erected before the temples. There are many pagodas which are seven or eight hundred years old, and as solid as when first built. There is a reason for this, and it lies in their construction. A pagoda is practically a framework of heavy timbers which start from a wide base, and is in itself a substantial structure, but it is rendered still more stable by a peculiar device. Inside the framework and suspended from the apex is a long, heavy balk of timber two feet thick or more. This hangs from one end, and to the other end are bolted, at each of the four sides, four more heavy timbers, and if the pagoda be very lofty still more timbers are added on to these. The whole forms an enormous pendulum, which reaches to within six inches of the ground. When the shock of an earthquake rocks the pagoda the pendulum swings in unison and keeps the centre of gravity always at the base of the framework. Consequently, the equilibrium of the pagoda is never disturbed, and this is the explanation of the great age of many of them, when from their height one would suppose them to be peculiarly susceptible to the effect of an earthquake.

FACETIE.

WOMAN is always pleased with the last new wrinkle, provided it is not on her own face.

"WHY are girls called misses?" "Did you ever see 'm try to hit anything!"

ETHEL: "Is it wrong to fall in love, mamma?" Mamma (after a moment's thought): "How much is he worth?"

MR. BROWN: "I've got a cold or something in my head." Mrs. Brown: "It must be a cold, dear, I'm sure."

Mrs. McBRIDE: "John, dear, why are some grocers called green grocers?" "To distinguish them from cash grocers, darling."

HE: "I received a tremendous ovation as I went behind the scenes last night." She: "Yes; it was your first disappearance, you know."

HUMOROUS EDITOR: "You have carried this joke a little too far." Sad Humorist: "Yes, sir; that is why I wish to leave it with you."

SUITOR: "I am sure your heart is in the right place." Beloved: "I am glad to hear you say so. I have just given it to the other fellow."

MAUD: "They've each got a touch of brimstone in their tempers." Helena: "Is that so? Then they ought to make a good match."

"I SENT six poems to that new magazine, and now I hear it has failed." "Too bad! But don't be discouraged; maybe they won't sue you for damages!"

IRASCIBLE OLD GENT: "Waiter, this plate is quite cold!" "Yes, sir; but the chop is 'ot, sir, which I think you'll find it'll warm up the plate nicely, sir."

PROFESSOR (seeing the sign "freely painted" over the zebra's cage in the Zoological Garden): "How very strange! I could have sworn that those stripes were natural."

SNACKS: "Have you read that article on 'How to Tell a Bad Egg?'" Snicks: "No; but if you have anything important to tell a bad egg my advice is, break it gently."

PROFESSOR: "Here, young ladies, you observe a tobacco plant." One of the Young Ladies: "Ah! how very interesting, Professor! Pray, how long will it be before the cigars are ripe?"

FRIEND (on the ice): "What are you studying over?" Mr. Uglinugg: "I can teach any girl to skate in a day, but with that fool, Mr. Hand-some, they don't learn to stand alone in a month."

"I WOULD have you to know," said Pomponious, "that I am a self-made man." "Well," said young Rasper, "there's one thing certain, you needn't waste any money securing a patent."

"MR. DOSELETS, will you please to name the bones of the skull?" said the professor to the medical student. "I've got them all in my head, professor, but the names don't strike me at the moment," was the perplexed reply.

Mrs. THINKHARD: "Of late years the spread of intelligence among all classes has been simply wonderful." Old Bachelor: "Yes, I notice there has been a great falling off in the number of marriages."

MA: "Vell, Aaron, it is little Ahy's birthday to-morrow; vat are you going to give him for a present?" PA: "If he's a very good boy, I'll have the front vinders cleaned, and let him look at the carriages going by."

"You must let the baby have one cow's milk to drink every day," said the doctor. "Very well, if you say so, doctor," said the perplexed young mother; "but I really don't see how he is going to drink it all."

FATHER: "Why don't you work, my son? If you only knew how much happiness work brings you would begin at once." Son: "Father, I am trying to lead a life of self-denial in which happiness cuts no figure. Do not tempt me."

"SIR," said the judge to the young man who was present as the defendant in a breach of promise suit; "you will please to discontinue your joking remarks during the remainder of this trial. You may court in jest, but you cannot jest in court."

HE (diffidently): "Has your mother spoken of me at all?" SHE (blushingly): "She said if you attempted to kiss me I was to resist." HE: "I—er—why, I wouldn't attempt to kiss you for the world!" SHE (coldly): "Haden't we better go in?"

QUIET MAN (on first night of new piece): "Excuse me, but I don't see any occasion for such violent applause." Demonstrative Neighbor: "I do, my friend. The author is one of my wife's boarders, and he's over two months behind with his bill."

SOME girls were admiring a statuette of Andromeda, which was labelled "Executed in Terra Cotta." "Where is Terra Cotta?" asked one of them, with probably some vague idea of Terra del Fuego. "I'm sure I don't know," was the reply, "but I pity the poor girl wherever it is!"

Mrs. HAUGHTON (in restaurant): "While we're waiting, I'll take one of those tablets the doctor prescribed." Mr. Haughton: "But, my dear, the doctor said they should be taken one hour before meals." Mrs. Haughton: "Oh, they never keep you waiting much longer than that here!"

"AND this is silver ore, is it?" said Mrs. Snaggs, as she examined the piece of curious-looking mineral. "Yes, my dear," replied her husband. "And how do they get that silver out?" "They smelt it." "Well, that's queer," she added, after applying her nose to the ore; "I smelt it, too, but didn't get any silver."

"THE great objection I have to the 'house,' said the tenant, "is that I can always hear vague murmuring, caused by the people talking next door." "Well, ma'am," said the landlord, "I can have the walls made thicker for you." "Thicker!" she exclaimed; "why, then I couldn't hear a thing."

At a reception in Paris a traveller, who was a strong "Anti-Semitic," was talking to Rothschild on the beauties of the Island of Tahiti, and sarcastically remarked, "There are neither hogs nor Jews there!" "Indeed!" retorted Rothschild. "Then you and I should go there together. We should be great curiosities."

SAID a son to his father who had asked him what position he held in his class: "Oh, pa, I've got a much better place than I had last quarter." "Indeed! Well, where are you?" "I'm fourteenth." "Fourteenth, you little larry-bones! You were eighth last term. Do you call that a better place?" "Yes, sir; it's nearer the fire."

"REMEMBER, boys," said the teacher, "that in the bright lexicon of youth there's no such word as fail." After a few moments a boy raised his hand. "Well, what is it, Socrates?" asked the teacher. "I was merely going to suggest," replied the youngster, "that if such is the case it would be advisable to write to the publishers of that lexicon, and call their attention to the omission."

"MR young friend," said the millionaire, frowning, "you admit that you are poor, and you know that my daughter is very wealthy. Would you, a pauper, marry her, knowing her to be worth a million?" "Sir," said the young man, who was a person of intense resolution, "my affection is proof against such tests. I would marry your daughter if she were worth two million."

MR. JONES wanted to leave by the last train, and not knowing when it left, sent his servant to see, saying: "John, go down to the station and see when the last train goes; and hurry back and tell me." John went off and did not return for two hours, when he rushed back into the room all out of breath. "Where have you been all this time?" demanded the master. "Train just left, sir, this very minute," was John's reply.

"YOUR master's not at home, eh! Pat?" inquired a caller. "No, aor. He do be in the ould country these three weeks, aor," replied Pat. "Excuse me, Pat, but how is it that when your mistress is on this side of the water your master's on the other, and vice versa? Is there any trouble between them?" "None at all, aor. Only they've agrade bechune 'em that they can live together better when they're apart."

SOCIETY.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales celebrated their thirty-second wedding-day on Sunday, the 10th inst.

PRINCESS LOUISE and the Marquis of Lorne celebrated their twenty-fourth wedding-day on Thursday, the 21st inst.

THE Young Men's Friendly Society's National Bazaar, to be held at Kensington Town Hall on May 7th, 8th, and 9th, will be opened by the Princess Louise, Marchioness of Lorne.

It is thought that very likely an engagement will be arranged between Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein and the Duke of Augustenbourg. The Empress Frederick has long had this match in view, and now it is likely to become an accomplished fact. The Duke is the brother of the German Empress and nephew of Prince Christian.

SABLE was very much in evidence at the Drawing Room, and nothing could be more charming than the beautiful fur mingled artistically with the rich fabrics of the Court gowns. Old lace was also much worn. Many of the dresses were worn lined with the brightest and showiest of colours, grass-green and several brilliant shades of red being in much favour, but very pale blue and very pale yellow were also conspicuous, and were very effective.

THE special train in which the Queen travelled from Cherbourg to Nice was provided by the Paris and Lyons Company, and consisted of saloons with sleeping accommodation, first-class carriages, and luggage vans. The Queen and Princess Beatrice occupied Her Majesty's own private saloons, which are kept at the Gare du Nord, Brussels, and have been overhauled lately. There is a communication between these two carriages, the one being used during the day, while the other has beds, a bath, and every possible requisite for comfortable travelling at night.

THE wedding present of the German Emperor and Empress to the Emperor and Empress of Russia, which was recently despatched from Berlin to St. Petersburg, consists of a superb dinner-service for thirty persons, which has been made at the Royal Porcelain Works in Berlin. The service is an exact copy of one at the Neue Palais in Potsdam, which was made for Frederick the Great from his own designs. It is in the richest rococo style, with a ground of pale blue painted with flowers and elaborately gilded. There is a very large candelabrum, with columns and winged cherubs holding shields with the monograms of the Emperor and Empress of Russia, and each piece bears the Imperial arms.

SOME of the admirers of the Duchess of York have gone a little too far in describing her as the "third greatest lady in the land." The Princess of Wales is the second lady in the land. The third place belongs by right to the Empress Frederick, the Queen's eldest daughter, now with us on a separate footing as a foreign Sovereign's widow. Princesses Christian, Louise, and Beatrice rank next according to age. The Duchesses of Coburg, Connaught, and Albany then follow. Then comes the Duchess of York's turn; and it will be seen that she is "tenth greatest lady in the land," and not third. In this respect, everything is regulated by relationship to the actual Sovereign, not by possible positions under the next reign. The eldest son's wife also ranks before daughters, who, in their turn, precede the wives of younger sons.

THE Queen's sojourn at Cimiez will be a very expensive item in the Privy Purse accounts, for, in addition to the huge sum which will be paid as the rent of the hotel during the months of March and April, all kinds of alterations and improvements have been carried out at Her Majesty's expense. Extensive changes in the internal arrangements of the hotel have been made, and a number of rooms have been re-decorated, while a lift (constructed at Milan) has just been fitted, an electric bell service has been introduced, the water-supply has been extended and improved, a large bathroom has been added, and the whole of the sanitary arrangements have been thoroughly overhauled.

STATISTICS.

LONDON has 10,000 professional musicians.

EXPRESS trains pass each other at a velocity of ninety yards a second.

In the Bank of England 60 folio volumes or ledgers are filled daily with writing in keeping the accounts.

THE proportion of killed to the number of railway travellers is, in France, one in 19,000,000; England, one in 28,000,000; and in the United States, one in 2,400,000.

THE rapidity with which certain species of insects move is astonishing. The common house-fly is known to make 600 strokes per second with his wings, and the dragon-fly 1,500. In the case of the fly, the 600 strokes cause an advance movement of 27 feet.

GEMS.

THOUGHT and theory must precede all action that moves to salutary purpose; yet action is nobler in itself than either thought or theory.

To discover truth is the best happiness of an individual; to communicate it the greatest blessing he can bestow upon society.

MAN is not the creature but the architect of circumstance. It is character which builds an existence out of circumstance. Our strength is measured by our plastic power; from the same materials one man builds palaces, another hovels; bricks and mortar are bricks and mortar until the architect can make them something else.

MEN seem neither to understand their riches nor their strength. Of the former they believe greater things than they should; of the latter much less. Self-reliance and self-denial will teach a man to drink out of his own cistern and eat his own sweet bread, and to learn and labour truly to get his living and carefully to expend the good things committed to his trust.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BOILED ICING.—Boil one cup of granulated sugar with four tablespoonfuls of water until it drops from the spoon in threads. Have ready the beaten white of one egg, and pour the syrup slowly into it, beating all the time. Flavour, and spread on cake while warm.

GERMAN POTATO SALAD.—Boil six good-sized potatoes, peel and slice while hot, and pour over the following: Cut one-half pound lean bacon into small dice and fry brown. Season potatoes with salt, pepper, and finely sliced onions. Mix thoroughly with the bacon fat and dice, and then add one-half cup of white vinegar. Garnish with sliced hard-boiled eggs.

SOUP MILK-MUFFINS.—To a pint of sour milk put one unbeaten egg, a little salt, a teaspoonful of soda and one of butter melted with the soda in a spoonful of hot water. Make rather a thick batter and beat it well. Have the griddle of a moderate heat, grease it and also the rings, lay them on and fill them only half full of the batter. Increase the heat a little. In about eight minutes turn them and let them stay three or four minutes longer. To turn them without spilling requires some dexterity.

RICE WAFFLES.—Two cups of flour, one-half teaspoonful of salt, one teaspoonful of baking powder, one egg beaten separately, one tablespoonful of butter, one cup of milk, one cup of boiled rice (cold), one-half cup of rice water. Sift the dry ingredients together into a bowl. Make a hole in the centre, into which put the rice and the water in which the rice was boiled. Add the well-beaten yolk of the egg, the milk and melted butter. Stir until thoroughly mixed. Beat well, and add gently the white of the egg, which has been beaten to a stiff froth. Fry in a well-greased waffle iron.

MISCELLANEOUS.

HORSES and cattle in Australia are branded by electricity.

THE Japanese trace descent only from the father. Thus when an aristocrat marries a plebeian wife their children are his equals and quite her superior, and are apt to look down upon her.

It is claimed that the paper horsehoe has been used with success in Germany. It becomes rough by wear, and is therefore a security against slipping, the chief defect of the metal shoe.

THE velocity of wind is continually changing. It varies every second, and, while the average velocity may be twenty-three miles an hour, in the course of one minute it will be altered several times.

THE wettest place in the world is Cherrapunji, in Assam, where the average rainfall for fifteen years has been four hundred and ninety-three inches. In 1861 it was nine hundred and five.

THE cloth of the old Egyptians was so good that, though it has been used for thousands of years as wrappings of the mummies, the Arabs of to-day can wear it. It is all of linen, the ancient Egyptians considering wool unclean.

A NEW kind of giraffe has been discovered in Africa near the Gulf of Aden. Its skin is neither striped nor mottled, but is of a bright chestnut colour, marked with almost invisible lines of creamy white.

A BODY of "Sahara troops" is to be raised by France for services in her arid African possessions, where the heat is fatal to French soldiers. They are to consist mainly of natives of those regions, but the officers will be Frenchmen.

THE ten largest words in the English language are said to be:—Valetudinarianism, subconstitucionalism, incomprehensibility, philoprogenitiveness, honorificabilitudinitas, anthropophagarianism, disproportionableness, locipedeatristical, transubstantiation, proantitransubstantiation.

AN instrument for detecting the presence of escaped gas has been placed on the market, and is claimed to do its work safely and effectively. It contains an air column, the length of which is measured by the amount of air necessary to produce a musical note of standard pitch, and as the length of the column depends upon the density of the air, the presence of the gas is shown by a difference in the sound.

A TUBULAR boiler eighteen hundred years old has been discovered at Pompeii. It is made of sheet metal, probably copper, in the shape of a large amphora, or two-handled jar with a hollow space running half way up the centre of the jar. In this space was placed a cylindrical firebox resting on five firebars, which are tubes three-quarters of an inch in diameter, connecting with the water space. The fuel seems to have been charcoal.

ONE of the schemes for future engineers to work at will be the sinking of a shaft twelve thousand or fifteen thousand feet into the earth for the purpose of utilizing the central heat of the globe. It is said that such a depth is by no means impossible, with the improved machinery and advanced methods of the coming engineer. Water at a temperature of two hundred degrees centigrade, which can, it is said, be obtained from these deep borings, would not only heat houses and public buildings but would furnish power that could be utilised for many purposes. Hot water already at hand is necessarily much cheaper than that which must be taken when cold and brought up to the required temperature. Once the shaft is sunk, all cost in the item of the hot-water supply ceases. The pipes, if good, will last indefinitely, and as Nature's stokers never allow the fire to go out, there would come in the train of this arrangement many advantages. When by sinking a shaft in the earth we can secure a perpetual heating apparatus which we can regulate by the turning of a key, one of the trials of life will fade into nothingness.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CONSTANT READER.—It rests with the magistrates.

M. D. M.—Artificial whalebone is made of leather.

E. F.—As a rule, the landlords of flats include all such charges in the rent.

IGNORANT.—To run concurrently means that the sentences are to run together.

WILLER.—A vase, statuette, or any other parlour or toilet ornament would be suitable.

INQUIRER.—The full list would occupy too much space.

IN DESPAIR.—We can only advise you to continue the search.

HOPE.—There are several ways, but all are more or less harmful.

VICTOR.—We strongly advise you to consult a solicitor at once.

DOUBTFUL.—London is by far and away the largest city in the world.

HOOD.—If the hiring is at so much per week that amount of notice will suffice.

SEDMOND.—We cannot advise you; there are no offices in London.

JERRY.—A letter to the manufacturer will elicit all the information necessary to know upon the subject.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—Only if the company can be proved to be at fault.

MARTHA.—Dye it with an infusion of cochineal. It is a difficult process.

PATRICK.—Your coin is a Spanish one, and hardly any value in this country.

OLIVE.—Half-farthings are not in circulation anywhere in the United Kingdom.

R. A. G.—First beat thoroughly; next shake; then sprinkle pepper and camphor.

INDIGNANT.—You must pay, as the breakage occurred through compliance with your wish.

COOK.—Fish may be scaled more easily by first dipping them into boiling water for a minute.

PATERNALIST.—The Society has a splendid school for female children, and an excellent institution for boys.

OLD READER.—The Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea, is a refuge for the children of soldiers of the regular army.

AMUSE.—By showing them to an expert, either an amateur or some one in the trade upon whom you can rely.

FIVE YEARS' READER.—Some of noblemen are lords by courtesy only; the eldest usually adopts one of his father's subsidiary titles.

R. S. V.—Indiarubber is readily dissolved with benzene, but it remains in liquid form until evaporation takes place.

CURIOUS.—A fatal fall from a great height is said to be painless, as unconsciousness precedes the crash of concussion.

DIANA.—Both of these things are seriously objectionable, and will cause remarks that no well-bred girl ought to deserve.

CATRINA.—We can only say that the least you have to do with any of them is the better it will be for your pocket and domestic quietude.

NOVELLER.—One cannot expect to have sight, hearing, or strength like one had in early life. Syringing the ear with sweet oil will be comforting.

INJURED INNOCEENCE.—You can hardly expect your employer to frame his testimonial to the value of your services according to your own estimate.

B. S.—You cannot make up one yourself; it is often done with the ordinary well-known enamel paints you buy, and which you can get any colour.

CHLOE.—A suitor who hesitates to make the avowal expected of him, unless he has the very best reason for withholding it, is not the one to make himself a good husband.

INQUIRITIVE.—The ticking of a watch placed against the teeth can be distinctly heard, because the sound is conveyed through the teeth and bones of the head to the drum of the ear.

BENJAMIN.—The cross mark still used occasionally instead of a signature did not originate in ignorance. It was always appended to signatures in medieval times as an attestation of good faith.

ARTHUR.—Constant practice will improve your handwriting, which is quite fair, and considering that your education has been interrupted by sickness you have no reason to feel depressed concerning it.

LURIA.—A correct spoon to use for peas is perforated in the middle. If melted butter is desired over the peas the curved rim of the spoon, if held sideways, will hold the butter.

DAYDOL.—Wash it with a lather of yolk of egg and tepid water; then wash out with clean tepid water, and when dry lightly oil. If the above is not sufficient try washing soda in the water.

HOUSEKEEPER.—Mattresses are now often made in three pieces. Thus made, a mattress is more durable, because the position of the sections can be changed from time to time, and the bed kept more even.

L. D.—To be a member of a society, in the true sense, we must do our part toward contributing to its welfare, while to be patriotic, we must cherish a proper pride of country, its laws and institutions.

BIDDY.—If a mantelpiece with the usual sort of discolouration, a little spirit of salt in water well-rubbed on and afterwards well rubbed off and washed off will clean it. Be careful of the spirit of salt, as it burns.

JOSEPH.—Superintendent registrars are bound to have notices of marriages posted up in their offices in some conspicuous place. On the marriage day the ceremony must be performed with open doors, as in a church or chapel.

SWEET SIXTEEN.—The Secretary of the Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, will supply you with all information regarding examinations for appointments as sorters and telegraphists on your applying to him.

REGULAR SUBSCRIBER.—No watch keeps perfectly correct time, and even the best chronometers used in observatories and on board ships must be regulated according to tables which are kept to fix the variations to which all watches are liable.

PETTY DOUBT.—Prudence should dictate to you the proper course to pursue, and while offending none of your other advisers, so conduct yourself as to give no real cause of affront to the one whom you have evidently convinced has found favour in your eyes.

THE QUEST.

There once was a restless boy
Who dwelt in a home by the sea,
Where the water danced for joy,
And the wind was glad and free;
But he said, "Good mother, oh, let me go;
For the dullest place in the world I know,
Is this little brown house,
This old brown house,
Under the apple tree.

"I will travel east and west;
The loveliest homes I'll see;
And when I've found the best,
Dear mother, I'll come for thee.
I'll come for thee in a year and a day,
And joyfully then we'll haste away
From this little brown house,
This old brown house,
Under the apple tree."

So he travelled here and there,
But never content was he;
Though he saw in lands most fair
The loveliest homes there be,
He something missed from the sea or sky,
Till he turned again, with a wistful sigh,
To the little brown house,
The old brown house,
Under the apple tree.

Then the mother saw and smiled,
While her heart grew glad and free.
"Hast thou chosen a home, my child?
Ah, where shall we dwell?" quoth she.
And he said, "Sweet mother, from east to west,
The loveliest homes, and the dearest and best,
Is a little brown house,
An old brown house,
Under an apple tree."

R. S. B.

ARCHIE.—A chest expander might be of benefit, but dumb bells or Indian clubs would be more beneficial still, and if you made a regular practice of pulling yourself up ten or a dozen times to a bar with your hands three or four times daily that also would help.

A. C. The amount of sleep necessary to insure health must be regulated by the sex, the temperament, and the habits of individuals. As a rule, women require more sleep than men; and the average for the former is eight hours—for the latter, seven.

OSCAR.—There is no recruiting for Cape Mounted Police in this country; a sufficient number of men are got in the colony to fill all vacancies in the corps; but you can write to the Agent-General for the Cape, Victoria-chambers, Westminster, London, S.W., on the subject, and hear what he says.

AMATEUR NURSE.—Take of the barley two ounces; water, a sufficient quantity. Having washed away the extraneous matters which adhere to the barley, boil it with half a pint of water for a short time, and throw away the resulting liquid. Then, having poured on it four pints of boiling water, boil down to two pints, and strain.

BETTY.—Cut up a chicken, and put it into a quart of cold water; let it simmer until reduced to a little less than a pint, remove it from the fire, and strain as for jelly; season with a little salt. Chop the breast meat into small pieces, and mix with the liquor; then pour the whole into a mould, and set it away to cool.

PERPLEXED.—A colony of English means one of people exclusively from this part of Great Britain; but an English colony would comprise persons from the rest of the United Kingdom. The more correct expression is British colony, because the term British applies equally to England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

LOVE-SICK.—There is only one way for your admirer to adopt to get acquainted with you, and that is to be introduced to you in due form by some friend. To recognise him on the street, or manifest in any way your desire to have him call upon you, would be very imprudent, and in violation of the established rules of custom as well as of propriety.

ANNA.—Wash thoroughly with soda and warm water to remove all grease. Then rub the surface with oxalic acid and water, using a clean piece of rag. Wash off with clean water to remove acid, and rub well with oxide of tin and water to bring up the gloss. Use a fresh clean piece of rag for this. Of course if the article is not real, but a mere make-up of competition, the above will be of no use.

ADRY.—To resist damp it should have as little saline admixture as possible. When you are buying it in the crude state put your tongue to it, and if it tastes either salt or acid do not have it; if it smells bad when you have had your tongue on it, that too, should be rejected; and, if it is good in these respects, another test. It should stand a good deal of soaking in cold water to make it swell. Do not let it stand hot, when using, too long, or heat it up too often, as this tends to weaken its power.

MARIE.—Beat the yolks of two eggs and add them to one cup of milk, with one teaspoonful of melted butter. Beat this thoroughly with one and one-half cupsful of gluten flour, sift in one teaspoonful of baking powder, and whisk the white of the two eggs until light, and stir altogether for five minutes. Heat and butter the oven pans, put in the batter, and bake in a hot oven for twenty-five minutes. Gluten and whole-wheat flour should be thoroughly baked to get the best flavour. The crust should be as brown as roasted coffee.

FRANCIS.—Put a frying kettle full of fat over the fire to heat. Sift together one pound of flour, one teaspoonful each of salt and bicarbonate of soda, and half a saltspoonful of grated nutmeg. Beat half a pound of sugar and quarter of a pound of butter to a cream and add them to the flour. Beat the yolks of two eggs to a cream, add them to the first-named ingredients, beat the whites to a stiff froth and reserve them. Mix into the flour and sugar enough sour milk to make a soft dough, and then quickly add the whites of the eggs. Roll out the paste at once, shape and fry.

OSWALD.—The giant of the earthworms is a creature of Australia. Although it is a monster from four feet to six feet in length, and from one inch to one-and-three-quarter inches in diameter (according to a scientific writer), it is as harmless as our common earthworm, which it much resembles both in colour and bodily structure. Like our common earthworm, it can only be removed from its burrows with great difficulty. If a portion of the creature's body be uncovered and grasped, with the intention of pulling it from its burrow, the worm will hold to the sides of its den until its body is pulled in two.

AMOR.—Inade put a few small cinders from under the grate and fill up with warm water to which a little pearlash and a spoonful or two of freshly-slaked lime have been added. Empty out till about three-quarters full, and rinse well by agitation. Then fill up with the same mixture and stand the dish in a pan or vessel large enough to allow of their being quite immersed in warm water prepared as above. Let them stand for half an hour or so, then rinse well as above and use a brush on the outside to get into the crevices of cutting, &c. Finally rinse in clean water, and unless there is something radically wrong with the glass itself, you will find them bright.

ROSEMOND.—Melt in a saucepan in a little tepid water four ounces of grated chocolate; remove and pour into a bowl to smooth nicely; mix into it five or six spoonfuls of vanilla sugar, beating it vigorously, then add four or five spoonfuls of the following preparation: Place in a tureen two tablespoonfuls of flour, a pinch of arrow-root, two tablespoonfuls of sugar, and a little salt; dilute with half a glass of milk; strain into a saucepan and add two table spoonfuls of melted butter and a little vanilla; stir on the fire until it boils, and when smooth reduce till it is consistent and detaches from the pan; take out and let partly cool. Add yolks of eight eggs, two ounces of melted butter, four beaten whites of eggs and three spoonfuls of whipped cream. When all these ingredients are well incorporated pour the preparation into one or two scullie pans without filling them too high. Set the pan on a small baking sheet and bake the souffles in a slack oven from twenty to twenty-five minutes.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all Booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 405, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free. Eightpence. Also Vol. LXIII., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXIII. is Now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 254, Strand, W.C.

!† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 254, Strand, by G. F. CORNFORD; and printed by WOODFALL and LINDEN, 70 to 74, Long Acre, W.C.